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NEW STATESMAN

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- One law for the poor
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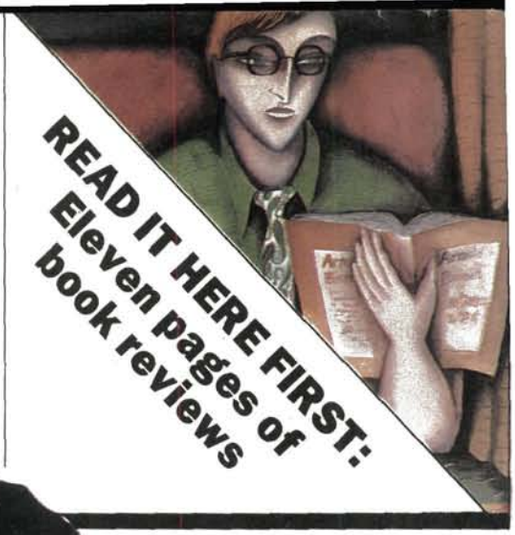
- Below Grade
- The King's Cross inferno
- Theatre in Enniskillen



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NEW STATESMAN

Vol 114 No 2957 27 November 1987

CONTENTS

FEATURES

Rob Edwards: Edinburgh Diary 4
Ben Pimlott: *Livingstone juggles in Brent* 5
News 6
Edward Pearce: Labour and devolution 9
An extract from **Mikhail Gorbachev**'s 'Perestroika' speech, 4 Nov. 1987 10
Jolyon Jenkins: The lack of vision behind the Legal Aid Bill 14
Michael Steed: How to nobble Thatcher 16
John Ellis: Channel Four's new chief 18
Christopher Hitchens: El Salvador's megalomaniac 19
Jane Dibblin: The women disrupting Greenham 20

ESSAY

Hilary Bichovsky-Little: Does keep-fit keep the politics away? 22

BOOKS

Boyd Tonkin: *Imagining the Penitentiary* 26
Leslie Dick: *Casting Off* 28
Cynthia Rose: Paperbacks 28
Steven Rose: *Thinking Machines* 31
Books of the Year: Reviewers' selection 32
Hilary Wilce and **Marsha Rowe:** Children's choice 34
Scott Bradfield: Fiction 35
Jon Savage: *20 Years of Rolling Stone* 36
Connie Bensley: Poem 36

ARTS

Judith Williamson: *House of Games* 37
Naseem Khan: Arts Centres 39
Victoria Radin: *J. J. Farr* and *Berlin Days Hollywood Nights* 39
Paul Allen: *Pentecost* at Enniskillen 40
Jules Lubbock: *Age of Chivalry* 41
Hugo Williams: Television 42

FUN

Weekend crossword 46
Weekend competition 46
John Minnion: Take Me to Your Leader 47
Chess: George Botterill 47
This England 47

PLUS

Roger Woddis 4
Christian Clark 19
Letters: 43

NEXT WEEK

Can Labour win? An iconoclastic look at Labour's electoral chances.
Plus: The politics of desire — Jean Schuster on France's radical avant-garde

Blood on their hands

MRS THATCHER'S governments are careless of people's lives. Sometimes the loss of life has been spectacular — and never more so than in the decision to sink the *Belgrano*, which cost 368 Argentinian lives and, arguably, all the deaths and casualties which followed in the Falklands war. Sometimes it has even been taken into the government's calculations, as in the case of the two British hostages in Beirut killed in reprisal for Britain's connivance in the cowardly air strikes on Libya.

But most of the deaths are commonplace. They are not remarked upon. The rates of people killed or injured at work have risen, for example, after falling in the 1970s, as a direct result of the government's policies of de-regulation and the cutbacks in the work safety inspectorate. The refusal to fund the health service adequately has caused a steady drip, drip of deaths and human misery. Even as we write, the life of a six-week-old baby, David Barber, with a hole in his heart, hangs in the balance because the Children's Hospital in Birmingham hasn't enough specialist nurses to care for him after the operation he so badly needs. Doctors would have liked to operate on David six weeks ago.

Staff shortages may or may not have led directly to the Kings Cross inferno in which 30 people lost their lives and a further 20 were seriously injured. It has been established that it wasn't caused by a pile-up of rubbish, just as it has been established that dangerous concentrations of rubbish and debris exist at other busy London underground stations.

But it is equally clear that the stringent financial regime under which the London Regional Transport authority operates has made it less likely that this or any other fire would be detected in time, and less likely that it would be adequately dealt with once it had been detected. Not only have the staff levels on the underground been savagely cut. The staff training in dealing with fires and evacuating stations in any disaster has been shown to be utterly deficient.

LRT's capital investment levels haven't suffered, but though transport minister Paul Channon assured the Commons that 'safety considerations underlie a major part of the total investment programme', there is not much evidence of that in London's tube stations. Most of the investment seems to be going on prestige projects like the Terminal 4 extension at Heathrow, refurbishments, and the provision of facilities like badly needed new lifts and escalators — and not the modern smoke detection equipment and sprinklers which LRT were advised to install after the Oxford Street fire three years ago.

This must necessarily be stated in conjectural terms because ever since the conduct of the transport authority has been removed from democratic oversight by the Greater London Council, it has been impossible to get-up-to-date and accurate information about its policies. Even MPs have been powerless to prise the information from the government. But it is surely not conjecture to say that, had the LRT remained under any kind of democratic oversight, the public would have been able to raise issues of safety and demand satisfactory answers.

Two moments in Mrs Thatcher's Candide-like excursion to the tube station and local hospital stood out: the first as she peered uncertainly through the underground gloom, obviously not sure quite what the tube station might look like on an ordinary day; and then when, with sibillant insincerity, she called an end to the photo-opportunity in the hospital.

But she may have done herself more damage than she — in her invincible ignorance — realises. Ordinary people may begin to make the same 'political linkages' which (as the *Guardian* delicately phrased it), Frank Dobson, the forthright Labour MP, made in the Commons between the disaster and staff cuts on the tube, and at the London fire brigade and hospital. They, too, may begin to appreciate the contradictions between her tributes to brave fire-fighters and wonderful medical staff and the continuing financial pressures which the government is exerting on all three services. Government ministers have condemned the 'overspending' fire brigade and demanded £24 million cuts (with the loss of 800 jobs) next year. University College Hospital has to 'save' £5 million this year and £4 million next — and, ironically in the circumstances, needs funds to open a burns unit which the hospital can't afford at present.

People have died and suffered appalling injuries in three disasters brought about in part by the triumph of economies over safety: in the Manchester airline fire, the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise and now the Kings Cross fire. In all three cases warnings of the dangers which were being run were given. No one will be satisfied if the Kings Cross inquiry points the finger at a station master or maintenance fitter.

As Frank Dobson says: 'This time no one must be allowed to shelter behind a shield of corporate complexity and irresponsibility. This time they must all be in the frame.' It is part of the opposition's responsibility to make sure that this includes Mrs Thatcher and her ministers. The 'political linkages' must be made. □

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DIARY

Edinburgh

The nuclear industry, I have learnt, does not like me. Last week saw the latest in a long line of letters in the Scottish press attacking me for being 'extremely misleading' when writing about the industry's radiation widows (as in the *New Statesman* two weeks ago). An independent television production company was recently informed by the South of Scotland Electricity Board that it could only gain access to Torness nuclear power station and SSEB staff if it agreed to drop me as the proposed interviewer. 'The Board does not have confidence in your objectivity' an SSEB press officer told me. (What is the question that only I can ask that is so terrifying?)

Last year when I was doing some work for the BBC, several nuclear public relations men complained vigorously about my (as it happened rather remote) involvement with a planned programme about the Dounreay nuclear plant in Caithness. The local SDP MP, Robert Maclennan, whose utterances are sometimes rather difficult to distinguish from those of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, went so far as to write to the controller of BBC Scotland, Patrick Chalmers, demanding to know how he could guarantee objectivity in the presence of 'the best-known and politically committed critic of the nuclear industry'. I plead guilty to political commitment (presumably one of the worst insults in the SDP lexicon), but 'best-known' is plainly wrong. Somehow I don't think that my relationship with the nuclear enthusiasts is likely to improve. The book that James Cutler and I have just completed (which is due to be published next April by Sphere) is called *Britain's Nuclear Nightmare*. It will render the industry apoplectic.

○

I have enormous difficulty with this concept of 'objectivity' anyway. I've never met anyone whom I would call objective. I know people who are fair, who are honest and who have the ability to see both sides of any argument. But I regard people who pretend to objectivity, like those who pretend to be non-political, as liars. I cannot subscribe to some arbitrary notion of impartiality. The journalist James Cameron put it best when writing about the way he was attacked for opposing American involvement in Vietnam:

> I always tended to argue that objectivity was of less importance than the truth, and that the reporter whose technique was informed by no opinion lacked a very serious dimension . . . As I see it the journalist is obliged to present his attitude as vigorously and persuasively as he can, insisting that it is his attitude, to be examined and criticised in the light of every contrary argument, which he need not accept but must reveal.

○

One non-objective journalistic quest took me to Orkney for lunch the other day. The North of Scotland Hydro-electric Board gave me a free plastic pen (inscribed 'Pitlochry Power Station, fish ladder and dam'), a plastic-covered 1988 diary, the inevitable plastic-wrapped press pack and a free return flight to Kirkwall. I consumed some fresh salmon covered in slices of orange and cucumber, a piece of kiwi-fruit cheese cake with profiteroles, two glasses of red wine and three cups of coffee. Then, along with about a hundred other hacks and hangers-on, I was transported up Burgar hill to take part in the ceremony. Our much-esteemed Energy Secretary, Cecil Parkinson, opened Britain's biggest wind generator ('higher than Nelson's Column' it said in the press pack). He gave a smooth-chops speech, pressed a big red button and, slowly, accompanied by an Electricity Board official's nervous commentary, the huge blades began to turn. Cecil was given a bottle of whisky and a decanter, and made a weedy *Yes Minister* joke. At the subsequent press conference, he seemed to provide fulsome answers to about a dozen questions, but actually said nothing at all. He undoubtedly represents the apogee of the art of political flannel.

At lunch I sat with the heads of both the British and American wind energy associations. In the course of the conversation they made it quite clear what they thought of Orkney's new three-megawatt machine. It was, they suggested, likely to prove uneconomic as it was too big. Evidence from abroad has demonstrated conclusively that the future lies in larger numbers of much smaller machines. The whole public relations event, in other words, was an enormous con. It was a joy to witness.

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Last weekend I attended a rather more important and rather more depressing occasion — Labour's special Scottish conference in Edinburgh. It was meant to help forge the party's strategy in the light of its Scottish victory and British defeat. In the event all it seemed to achieve was the opening of some old wounds, particularly over the wisdom or otherwise of deliberate illegality (this time in the context of the campaign against the poll tax). Nearly everyone I talked to found the day dispiriting. In a fruitless attempt to ward off an impending headache, I spent some of the time continuing my private survey of verandahs. (There is an Australian joke about a man with a large paunch out jogging. As he passes a house, a voice calls out: 'Hey mate, I see you've built a verandah over the toyshop'.) The Labour conference yielded rather a disappointing array because of the growing number of ambitious activists who now cultivate the lean and hungry look. In contrast the Edinburgh Folk Festival bar earlier this year was like a major verandah construction project. The best display I have ever seen was at an event described by a friend as being 'memorable only for the topography of the paunch' — the National Union of Journalists' annual conference.

○

These days depression never lasts long. For, in two weeks time, I am heading further east than I have ever ventured before. As part of an elaborate plan to avoid Christmas and Hogmanay in Britain, I am spending a month wandering around the Himalayan foothills. In a rather haphazard training programme, I have been dragging friends up Scottish hills most weekends in recent months. In Glencoe recently three of us experienced a temperature inversion, one of the most joyous surprises that the mountains have ever sprung. After struggling for about three hours through thick wet mist up 3,400 feet, we emerged into bright sunshine. We could see about half a dozen mountains rising out of the endless rolling blanket of cloud. It was like finding paradise.

○

Above my desk is pinned my latest creed. It is headed 'Advice to frazzled environmentalists' and is written by an American activist, Edward Abbey. 'Do not burn yourself out', he warns. 'Be as I am — a reluctant enthusiast, a part-time crusader, a half-hearted fanatic. Save the other half of yourself for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the environment: it is important to enjoy it. While you can. While it's still there.' He goes on to urge us all to 'breathe deep of that yet sweet and lucid air, sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, that lovely, mysterious and awesome space.' If you follow such advice, writes Mr Abbey: 'I promise you one sweet victory over our enemies, over those deskbound men with their hearts in a safe deposit box and their eyes hypnotised by desk calculators. I promise you this: you will outlive the bastards.'

Rob Edwards

ROGER WODDIS

A Pong for Europe

Alone among the countries attending this week's North Sea Conference under the chairmanship of Nicholas Ridley, the Environment Secretary, Britain is to continue dumping pollution in the North Sea

Some talk of Peter Walker,
And some of Douglas Hurd,
Or claim that Malcolm Rifkind
Is Britain's greatest turd;
But of all the country's leaders
There's none that can compare
With Mr 'Mucky' Ridley,
Who occupies the chair.

Whenever it's a question
Of dumping oil and sludge,
Though others may see reason
Britannia will not budge.
Defying every pressure,
Ignoring every plea,
The dirty dog of Europe
Will foul the Northern Sea.

Then let us charge our glasses,
And drink a toast to those
Who take a stand for Britain,
And make you hold your nose.
They know the human species
Will prosper when replaced
By chemicals and faeces
And radioactive waste.

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BEN PIMLOTT

Will Neil Kinnock finally come to Ken's rescue?

THERE ARE two aspects of Ken Livingstone's recent outspokenness on Ireland that have been generally ignored. The first is that he means it. The second is the politics of Brent.

Livingstone's long-standing support for the republican cause first aroused tabloid interest in December 1982, after he had invited two Sinn Fein leaders to private talks at County Hall. Thereafter, in the face of repeated press attacks, he stood his ground. 'When Livingstone talks . . . about Ireland,' his biographer John Carvel wrote in 1984, 'unscripted, unprepared, he is charged with political electricity . . .'*

Livingstone's post-Enniskillen remarks are consistent with everything he has said previously. Consistency, however, is one thing. Timing is another, and it is this that has infuriated colleagues. They point out that he was well aware of the effects of re-stating his views at such a moment — the delight of the gutter press, and perhaps also the sacrifice of a crucial council seat, narrowly won by the Tories in Wandsworth. Would he have spoken out if he had been the candidate?

Livingstone had told Carvel in 1984 that he was not prepared to 'do what the media demanded I do each time' and simply condemn IRA outrages. But there was also another dimension: what a friend calls 'a fine sense of when and how to shock'. This can be stated as a firm principle. If you are rooting for the support of the ultra left, the best publicity is not just bad publicity, it is publicity so hostile that the Labour establishment is moved to issue a public reprimand. 'This has been my worst week since 1981', he was saying a few days ago, which means that it has been his best. 'Kinnock was the only one to remain silent,' reported the *Sunday Times* 22 November, 'as 10 shadow cabinet ministers unleashed their anger on Livingstone'.

Oh dear. The leadership is convinced, confides the *Guardian,* that Livingstone will become 'an isolated figure in the parliamentary party'. My word. But the most delicious offering was provided by the Deputy Leader. The Brent East MP, thundered Mr Hattersley, 'is not very important . . . Ken Livingstone represents hardly anything in the Labour Party.'

In which case, why the fuss? It is precisely because Livingstone represents a great deal, that the terrible penalty has been imposed of a sound telling-off by the chief whip. There was a time when such a punishment would have been one step away from expulsion. Instead, it is likely that Derek Foster feels the more uneasy, as the ghost of Michael Cocks taps him on the shoulder.

IN SHORT, it has been a pretty good autumn for the new MP. But it would be wrong to see Livingstone's behaviour purely in national terms. Certainly, not everything in his life is problem-free. One thing that isn't is Brent East constituency Labour Party.

In the long run, there is the question of holding the highly marginal seat. Brent East is unusually middle-class for a Labour-held constituency. What keeps it Labour is the huge ethnic population — more than half. One Labour Party member calls it the nearest thing to American, big-city, pork-barrel politics that Britain can offer. 'Ken couldn't be mayor of New York, so he came to Brent.' Ethnic votes are led by community leaders, who shop around. That is complicated enough: but Brent East is also suffering from the other 'London effect', yuppification. The constituency should stay Labour in 1992. But it is high on the Tories' hit list.

Ethnic politics is fun, if you have the stomach for it. Constituency politics in Brent East isn't, except for a masochist. 'Why was it,' puzzles Carvel, 'that he chose to make his parliamentary bid in what appears to have been one of the most unpleasantly acrimonious constituencies in the country?' Livingstone must ask himself this question, as he must also contemplate Matthew xxvi verse 46 ('All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword'). Reg Freeson was not an incompetent MP, nor a right-wing one. He was a hard-working, if dull, Labour loyalist who did his job adequately in Westminster and locally but fell foul of the ultras at the peak of their excitement.

> ***'Ireland is the one issue uniting Livingstone and the warring factions on his GC'***

Livingstone was brought in as an act of defiance, not just to oust Freeson, but also to cock a snook at the Walworth Road and Westminster elites. So far, he has been a disappointment. After the 1983 row — when the NEC blocked Freeson's deselection just before the election on procedural grounds — the far left tried again. Between nomination and selection, however, came Livingstone's centrist stand over the setting of a GLC rate. Furiously, the people who had put him forward deserted him, and backed Diane Abbott instead. He got the selection all the same, and they have never quite forgiven him. His recent nomination for the NEC — a splendid paradox this — was passed by his General Committee in the face of ultra-left opposition.

In fact, Livingstone was no sooner endorsed than he began to feel some of the pressures that bore down on his predecessor. His reasonable request to be given a list of party members was flatly rejected by his own General Committee. During the 1987 election campaign, the General Committee refused to publish literature which it had not, itself, passed as ideologically correct. Around this time, a friend found Livingstone looking depressed. 'What can I do,' asked the candidate, 'to make them pleased with me?'

Meanwhile there were other upsets, involving Brent council, which covers the three Brent constituencies. Bitterness engendered by the McGoldrick affair (during which Livingstone wisely avoided the press) spilt over into the separate issue of a large council deficit, and the need to reduce it in order to stay within the law. Merle Amory, black council leader and a close Livingstone associate, reluctantly accepted the necessity of a package of cuts and — with considerable courage — pushed it through a stormy council meeting, despite the opposition of Brent East General Committee, some of whose members turned up to shout 'Thatcher' and 'fascist' at the chair. In September, she resigned. The following week, in what some saw as an attempt to keep in with the far left, Livingstone publicly declared his opposition to the package. Relations between him and Amory are said not to be what they were.

SINCE THE departure of Amory, Brent politics has been in a state of unusual turmoil, even for Brent. Choosing a successor has not gone smoothly. In Brent East, the soft left seemed to prove its muscle by nominating Dorman Long (pro-cuts) for the leadership. The ultras won the next round when Ron Anderson (anti-cuts, and education chair during the McGoldrick business) got the backing of the borough party's local government committee. However, the Labour group ignored the latter recommendation and chose Long. Enraged, the ultras occupied the council chamber, and Anderson sat in the leader's chair, refusing to budge. There are now, in effect, two Labour groups, united only by their snarling dislike of one another.

All this could help Livingstone in the end, but it wants watching. What he now sees is that his own local party is highly unstable, and liable to unpredictable lurches, which could damage anybody unlucky enough to find themselves within range.

Which brings us back to Ireland. Not only is this Livingstone's favourite issue. It is also Brent's. Brent East has prided itself on sending Troops Out resolutions to Conference for a decade. At the start of the last election campaign, a motion to include a Sinn Feiner on Livingstone's platform was defeated, but only by five votes. On that occasion, Livingstone urged caution. But Ireland remains the one issue which now unites the MP and the warring factions on his General Committee.

A television politician who finds himself in parliament, Livingstone has yet to settle down. Locally he has a superstar effect on citizens, but he has yet to grow roots. He is happiest as the media's bogeyman, and, probably, his General Committee is happy that he should remain so.

'There's no sentiment in Brent East', says one old timer. 'They'd deselect you just like that'. At the moment, Livingstone is not at risk, but he is too smart not to take precautions. Meanwhile he must be wondering how he can use his proven talents on the national stage, from such a slippery, insubstantial base. □

* John Carvel, *Citizen Ken,* Chatto and Windus, London, 1984.

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No more woolly hats

BRUCE KENT, restored to frontline leadership as CND's chairperson, began his closing speech at their 30th annual conference in typical style. He addressed the journalists first, insisting that they should report the issues seriously and stop using unilateralist as a term of abuse and multilateralist as a praise word. Stop treating us, he said ebulliently, as a 'woolly-hatted load of loons'.

He could just be heard over the chanting of the looniest load ever to pile into CND in the hope of political pickings. These were the women from Greenham's Yellow Gate, better known as the King's Cross Women's Centre, who over the last 15 years have appeared variously as Wages for Housework, Women Against Rape, the English Collective of Prostitutes and whatever else has emerged as their Cause of the Day (see Jane Dibblin, p20).

They put up Wilmette Brown, who is black, for CND's Council, a position she won last year. Anticipating she would lose this year (she came near the bottom of the poll) a dozen women, all but one white, marched to the front as the election results were read out and held up sheets reading 'National Council is all white again'. A very long woman with bunches called Katrina Howse then began to dance and sing a loud song about going higher and higher. The delegates, who had earlier shown their disapproval by giving a standing ovation to an eloquent speech from Lyn Barlow attacking the Yellow Gate women for personal vendettas, intimidation and 'ego-tripping', slow handclapped the demonstrators. They had to strain their ears to hear Bruce Kent as he commended them for hard work in the face of immense provocation.

CND's guilt makes members vulnerable to groups like the Yellow Gate women (the campaign has always been a very white organisation, never having found a way to make a connection between nuclear disarmament and the issues that dominate black politics). But in fact this conference, held in the florid glory of the Hackney Empire, was less politically divided than in previous years. This is partly because the far-left groups now have no particular campaign to push inside CND. Their pressure in earlier years was as much to do with internal Labour Party battles over defence policy as with CND. That party battle is no longer being fought and, anyway, CND is no longer growing. The magnet of the coming clash lies elsewhere.

CND itself is changing. It has hired an advertising agency, whose unguarded words to the press caused fury among some delegates; it has streamlined a clutch of committees into just three and this year, for the first time, the Council proposed a 'strategic resolution' to conference, in an effort to focus the thousands of autonomous minds on political priorities. Being CND, this was done with the utmost respect for those autonomous minds: 'facilitators' led the thousand delegates through the resolution in small workshops on Saturday afternoon.

Though it may not have seemed so in those workshops which spent over half their time tiptoeing around exactly what they should discuss and in what order, the strategic resolution was felt to be a success. The actual debate on Sunday morning was better informed and more focused than usual, and agreed by a large majority that CND's priority should indeed be:

> to link the demand for independent nuclear disarmament by Britain to: a) the prospects for progress towards a nuclear-free Europe opened up by the INF negotiations and b) the developing public debate about the need for radical changes in British foreign policy.

Amendments put by CND Cymru, manor of the Communist Party's phone-tapped John Cox, which would have deleted reference to specific missile systems and specific topics for 'public education', were defeated. This controversy was essentially over how far disarmers, especially in the Labour Party, might be allowed to pull back from a commitment to unilateralism before being denounced.

In principle, the strategic resolution pulls the national leadership free from the constant pressure by local groups to put more resources into, say, Cruisewatch, campaigns against Trident, the various peace camps and 'direct actions'. Instead it provides the first step for a new orientation: foreign policy. As this fits in with the left's new embrace of Europe, the decision may return CND to the centre of political debate.

Clearly, it hasn't been there for the past year. Last year it made an effort to expand horizontally by embracing domestic nuclear issues, wrong-footing it at a time when Gorbachev not Chernobyl was exploding over the horizon. A resolution deploring the leadership's turn away from the objective of ridding the world of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to the objective of 'a nuclear-free world' was defeated. But the insistence that civil and nuclear power are different, if only in purpose, was made more confidently and sharply than before.

The decision to focus on foreign policy, the successful resolution to 'work for an immediate end to the Iran-Iraq war' (a touch of megalomania here?) show that whatever decisions it takes CND can never be a 'single issue campaign'. What matters to its future is whether those other issues make CND an effective force or a 'woolly-hatted load of loons'. At least delegates were reassured of one thing: the greater professionalism of the organisation means that even with a declining membership its income increased last year (up to £927,109 in March 1987 compared with £554,598 the year before) protecting it against the havoc of stormy changes in public opinion concerning the hopes, fears and value of nuclear disarmament.

Sarah Benton

Going out with a whimper

THE LIFE-SUPPORT machine which had kept *News on Sunday* in a coma for the past six months was switched off last week. With sales drooping towards the 100,000 mark the paper expired as it was launched — not with a bang but a whimper.

News on Sunday had been a journalistic zombie since the disaster of issue one on 26 April. Continuing publication had been simply an operation to save face, first of the Labour Party, and then the original foolhardy investors. Their saviour was Owen Oyston. Ironically for the Livingstonites who raised the original £6.5 million for the paper, while it has sunk without trace, Oyston has been launched as a minor celebrity and an important figure in the Labour movement.

Oyston's chance came three weeks after the paper hit the streets.On 12 May the auditors pronounced it effectively bankrupt. The paper would have folded there and then if the general election had not been announced the day before. Closing during the campaign, as Harry Timpson, the transport workers' representative on the board said at the time, would have been the equivalent of 'shooting yourself in both feet'.

Oyston, an original shareholder in the company, was the only hope. Having just sold his estate agency business, and with a well-earned reputation as a red-hot entrepreneur, he was handed the reins to keep the paper alive until 11 June through a series of weekly loans, donated jointly by himself and the Transport and General Workers' Union.

Immediately after the election, the TGWU, along with the other unions and left-wing councils who contributed the vast majority of the original investment, found themselves locked in an alien world of fast-moving events few of them understood. The dreams had long since evaporated. The object had been reduced to one of damage limitation, financially and — more importantly — in terms of publicity.

Oyston offered them a way out. The paper dipped in and out of receivership, emerging to be published by a new company, Growfar, in which the original *News on Sunday* investors were given a 25 per cent holding. With the TGWU giving him a free hand, Oyston squared up to the paper as a challenge, and a national stage for his extrovert showmanship. But changes of editors, and a style which veered up and down market, made no difference to the inexorable decline in circulation. Plans for a huge autumn relaunch were ditched and Oyston was baffled by the way readers kept falling away. He began to transfer his interest to his new union partners.

Oyston made his millions from estate agency — not the kind of business traditionally associated with socialist principles. However, he opened it up to 'ordinary people', by throwing out its stuffy pretensions, modernising its image and bringing it onto the High Street. The rest of the profession has since followed suit — at which stage he transferred to the new industry of cable television.

But throughout his business career in Lancashire he has helped the local Labour Party with various enterprise schemes which formed alliances between entrepreneurs like himself and the public sector. The importance of *News on*

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Sunday to him was never just the paper itself, but the opportunity to start forging a similar alliance with the national trade union movement.

The paper, after a decent interval, has had to go. But the major part of the plan is still going ahead and is much more financially healthy on its own. In conjunction with the TGWU, Oyston is working on schemes involving tapping union membership as a huge under-exploited market for financial and consumer services, modelled on those successfully practised by American trade unions. The initial projects revolve around discounts on goods and some form of credit card.

The unions, locked in with Oyston through their investment, are now being offered an entirely different opportunity to the one they had in mind when they first put their money in. As they struggle with falling memberships and the Thatcherite new order, their reaction to Growfar's determination to make money out of their members will be interesting to watch. Meanwhile, however awful the paper was, it is still sad to see it die.

Peter Chippindale and Chris Horrie

Peter Chippindale and Chris Horrie are authors of Disaster! — The Rise and Fall of News on Sunday, *to be published in the New Year by Sphere paperbacks.*

If the caption fits
No 45

Neither of them seem to be exactly *encouraging* the team they are both so interested in. Perhaps that's why Watford FC only drew against Oxford United last week. Is Elton already missing the team? Is Maxwell already regretting buying them? Let us know what you think by Monday 7 December. Thinks bubbles or captions please — winner gets a ten-pound book token.

Winner: No 43

Mrs Thatcher: 'I had it done privately. It doubles my punter contact at by-elections.' (*Brian Ruth, London.*)

Sweet charity

RELIGION and education have always been such truly profitable activities that the Charity Commissioners recognise them both as tax-exempt. Charities and religions get tax refunds on donations and statutory rate relief from local authorities.

The 'Church' of Scientology failed in its attempt to get tax relief on the grounds that it couldn't deliver a deity. Worship neither of Mammon nor his earthly incarnation L. Ron Hubbard was found acceptable as a divine substitute. So perhaps that was why in 1981 it established a school — a fee-paying 'independent' one no less, as befits an up-and-coming set of mental adepts. Not quite Eton, it caters for the children of the Scientologists who cluster around the East Grinstead headquarters of the sect. The school is registered as a charity, and the Scientologists took legal advice at an early stage about reconciling the necessary 'independence' with the distinctively dotty educational theories of L. Ron Hubbard.

The Charity Commissioners have been under fire lately from the National Audit Office for being too lax with the charities they monitor. Even if the law were clear, and it isn't, Treasury tightfistedness has kept the Commissioners' investigation staff minimal and resources even more so.

According to the Audit Commission's sample, over a quarter of the 154,000 charities hadn't submitted accounts for five years, and 22,000 didn't have a contactable address; yet possession of the magic charity register number secured automatic rate relief and exemption from paying taxes to the very Treasury that refused the resources to police them.

Charity law assumes an open-ness of beneficiaries. In 1984, counsel's advice to the trustees of the Scientologists' School, Greenfields, said, 'If Greenfields were to do something that closed the group it catered to, and thus not be for the public benefit, then it would result in difficulties regarding charitable status . . . No doubt a child could be expelled for his or her behaviour, but I can see no legal basis for expelling a child because of a parent's behaviour.'

This was in direct conflict with the Scientologists' renewed enforcement of their 'declared' policy against 'suppressive persons'. Since the putsch in the church following Hubbard's disappearance, there has been a purge at all levels, with any signs of opposition being 'declared'. A 'declared' person is excommunicated, outlawed and sent to Coventry — or at least away from Greenfields. They are, in Hubbard's words, 'fair game' for harassment and dirty tricks. It is a 'declarable' offence even for family members to associate with the 'declaree' — which is clearly impossible to reconcile with the openness required by charity law.

The former chair of the trustees, Marcus Allen, persisted in seeing old friends who had been 'declared' — and his son was in effect expelled from the school just before his GCE examinations. Allen, chair of the trustees when they received the original legal advice, was already deeply concerned at the sapping of the school's independence by 'church influence'.

Some of the disaffection among British Scientologists resulted from what they saw as a siphoning off of money from Britain to America: perhaps indicative of this was that the school was now asked — and of course agreed — to pay for a 'license' to quote Hubbard's works in the school newsletter. The initial cost was £1,260; which afterwards was increased to a percentage of the school's turnover.

The school was interesting in many ways. It hardly applied the Burnham Scale, since last year its 27 staff shared an annual staff bill of £58,593 — just over £40 a week each. They were well aware of their anomalous status, even to the extent of preparing 'laundered' minutes for the Charity Commissioners. We obtained two versions of the minutes for the trustees meeting of 5 February 1984. One finishes with a few platitudinous statements from the chair on page 8. That shows the school solicitor Stephen Bird leaving because of a 'conflict of interests'. The more accurate version goes on for three pages more and shows him in attendance as they discuss how to reconcile inner church strife and declarations while preserving the charitable status which gave them a 43 per cent tax rebate on donations.

Marcus Allen was becoming increasingly unhappy, and the minutes record that his colleagues were a little less than ecstatic about him. Why, he had actually allowed his children to play with the child of a 'declaree'. For this and similar signs of dissidence he was removed from the trustees in September 1984 to be replaced by more loyal members.

He has reported the incidents to the Charity Commissioners, who are doubtless worried that while there would be a ready market for any Scientology-bashing, action would create a dangerous precedent for any other denominational 'independent school'. 'Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.'

Ian Williams and Mark Hollingsworth

Mark Hollingsworth is a journalist on TVS' current affairs programme 'Facing south'. A programme on Scientology was shown on 13 November.

NEW STATESMAN SUBSCRIPTION POSTING 20 November 1987

The Head Postmaster at Colchester Post Office informed me today (25 Nov.) that last week's subscription mailing *was never posted* from his office and that copies of NS 20 Nov. have only been sent to subscribers today.

We shall be claiming compensation from the Post Office for the lost issue and any subscriber who wishes may have their subscription extended by one week.

If you do wish your subscription extended please write to our subscriptions department (*please do not telephone*) asking for this to be done.

Joanne Hurst

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Ridley's irrelevant measure

FOR SHEER irrelevance, the Housing Bill takes the biscuit. Nicholas Ridley claimed last week, on launching the Bill, that the deregulation of the private rented sector will bring 500,000 empty houses into use. He'll be lucky if it's 500.

A quick survey of half-a-dozen London estate agents this week reveals that there is no shortage of private rented property available. 'Yes sir, we have a range of accommodation available,' was the standard reply, followed by a rapid request for personal details. If Ridley thinks there is no free market for rented accommodation already, he should pick up the telephone and let his fingers do the walking. He will find that the going rent for a modest two-bedroomed flat in central London is around £250 a week.

There's only one problem, but it won't trouble the job movers that Ridley is so obsessed with. The lettings have to be to companies, to dodge the Rent Acts. All that Ridley's legislation does, by making all new lettings into 'assured tenancies' at a market rent, is to legitimise the existing situation. His cherished 'free' market has beaten Ridley to it.

The left, therefore, rather misses the point when it warns about the return of landlords like Rachman who hounded out tenants after the previous attempt at deregulation, the 1957 Rent Act. Since it is open to any reasonably knowledgeable landlord to evade the Rent Acts, the new legislation is unlikely to lead to many evictions. The smart landlords will have got rid of their 'fair rent' tenants long ago and created company lets or sold up. It is worth remembering, too, that in 1957 over a third of the population lived in the private rented sector, compared to just 8 per cent now.

The ones hit hardest by the Bill are the sons and daughters of existing tenants who lose their right to a protected tenancy on the death of their parents. That breaks pre-election ministerial promises about existing tenants being unaffected by any change, apart from the technicality that such people are not actually tenants themselves, although they may well have lived in their homes for decades.

They may well join the homeless, whom the Bill has nothing to offer, a point accepted by former Tory Environment Minister Sir George Young, who wrote recently that the 'government has not so far revealed its strategy for tackling homelessness'. We await it eagerly.

For council tenants, too, the Bill is largely irrelevant. Few tenants are likely to take advantage of the opt-out clause to pick a new landlord, because of a major tactical error by the government. Any new tenancy will have to be an assured tenancy, at a market rent, and therefore any tenants' association voting for such a change will need its collective head examined. A vital role for opponents of the 'pick a landlord' scheme is to make this clear to tenants. In a consultation paper released earlier this month, the Department of the Environment suggested that to prevent the selection of a new landlord, there must be a majority of tenants voting against the scheme, which means that abstentions count as yes votes.

Christian Wolmar

POLITICAL SKETCH

The high art of immobilism

Edward Pearce

IF THE ISSUE of Scottish devolution is not to settle down as a long-running kailyard comedy, somebody will have to get their act together. Certainly Labour had a melancholy afternoon of it on Monday. They had been outwitted by the Liberals who had smartly filled a gap with a motion of their own calling for a devolved assembly for Scotland *elected by proportional representation*.

Labour carries a lot of doctrine around with it. Other parties are like 'Abroad' to King George V. Labour hates them. Devolution is a good thing in the narrow sense that Labour does well in Scotland (although as somebody unkindly pointed out they do as well as the Tories in Britain — 42 per cent). But devolution is a narrow calculation of party interest rather than a thing wanted for its own sake. Concession to it has been keeping the Nationalist from the door since Willie Ross lost his nerve in the face of the Hamilton by-election. As for proportional representation, it is a device for making Labour co-operate with other parties, conference is against it, and you can't go stronger than that.

The Tories in principle were in no better state. They have the problem of non-existence for a start, one which makes every debate about Scotland a private agony. As one Labour backbencher had it, 'would the Conservative backbenchers stop moving about to make themselves look more numerous?'

On top of that Mr Rifkind, the Scottish Prime Minister, as David Steel called him, wears his very own designer albatross. He has been in his day one of the most devastatingly candid devolutionists to go on the record. If the early part of Mr Steel's speech seemed uncharacteristically cogent and unblurred, the reason for this became apparent. 'For the last three minutes or so, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have been quoting verbatim from a speech made by the member for Pentlands [Mr Rifkind] in 1978.'

Malcolm Rifkind in trouble has always believed in hiring a good lawyer and he has one at hand in Malcolm Rifkind. Subtly and impressively if by no means credibly he built up a federal defence. There is no other country which grants devolution to one area and not to others. What would be fine for Scotland and Wales (and who else?) would be wrong for Scotland alone. We would as it were be taking up a lopsided, one-wing form of devolved power without precedent. Anyway what about the Lothian question — the immortal issue attaching to Mr Dalyell, of that former constituency, that Scottish members must of necessity play a reduced part in all-British legislation? The Tories are happy on such occasions to desist from their traditional view of Tam Dalyell which is best summed up by the old Covenanter rhyme about Tam's Royalist ancestor:

> De'il and Dalyell begin wi' ane letter
> The De'il's nae guid and Dalyell's nae better.

Faced with motions for devolution they revert to their pre-*Belgrano* sentiments of 'Dear Old Tam, has his faults but sound man, you know'. The present Secretary of State will never be seriously embarrassed by a problem. He is a genuinely clever, lucid minister capable of making the fine distinctions by which a narrow path out of the thorns can be discerned and escaping with no worse scratches than a charge of casuistry. Mr Rifkind was all for devolution. His sentiments of 1978 had not changed, but circumstances, notably the decline of a call for overall devolution involving other regions, had, and of course the Lothian question did seem to be looming larger.

LABOUR had no such fortune. Donald Dewar corporeally present opted out of debate leaving the ship in the hands of John Maxton. Mr Maxton is a nice man but he is politically harmony, a bass line called in to agree, not a melody in his own right. Obliged to argue with Mr Rifkind he grew rapidly surly and personal — 'No principles, trying to please the Prime Minister.' Asked to clarify Labour's intentions, he fell back onto abuse of proportional representation. Indeed, having fallen back on a call for a referendum — yesterday's cop-out surely? — he was floored by the polite Liberal enquiry 'Will he then support a similar referendum on PR?' The badness of the Maxton speech — and it was very bad — did no more than complement the ill-thought-out and paralytically timid Labour position on electoral reform generally.

If there were any prospect of sweeping the nation to the tune of a heroic two-seat majority, there would be excellent self-interest reasons for keeping to a lopsided but expedient status quo. With Labour light years from power in Britain, but fascinated by a meretricious majority in Scotland, devotion to things as they are seems peculiarly obtuse.

Scotland is seen as a saving account luckily augmented in a sweepstake and not now to be touched. The thought that it may be the swing on which Labour has gained through the absence of PR while losing six assorted roundabouts for the same reason in England is not to be contemplated.

The sort of Labour opinion for which Mr Maxton speaks is dully aware that it has an asset and clutches it in nervous fear of letting it slip. The case for devolution is not that it is necessarily a Good Idea. It may be a bad idea which happens to be currently popular. But it does embarrass the centralising trend and the Liberals rightly made the most of this. As for PR, certainly it will diminish Labour in Scotland but together with coalition politics it is the only thing which will lift Labour off the bottom of the sea everywhere else. Thus to hear Mr Maxton give a very good impression of an equestrian statue pointing his sabre at nowhere in particular, making his own contribution to the high art of immobilism, was the most melancholy aspect of an instructive day. The somebody who must get their act together on Scotland is the Labour Party. □

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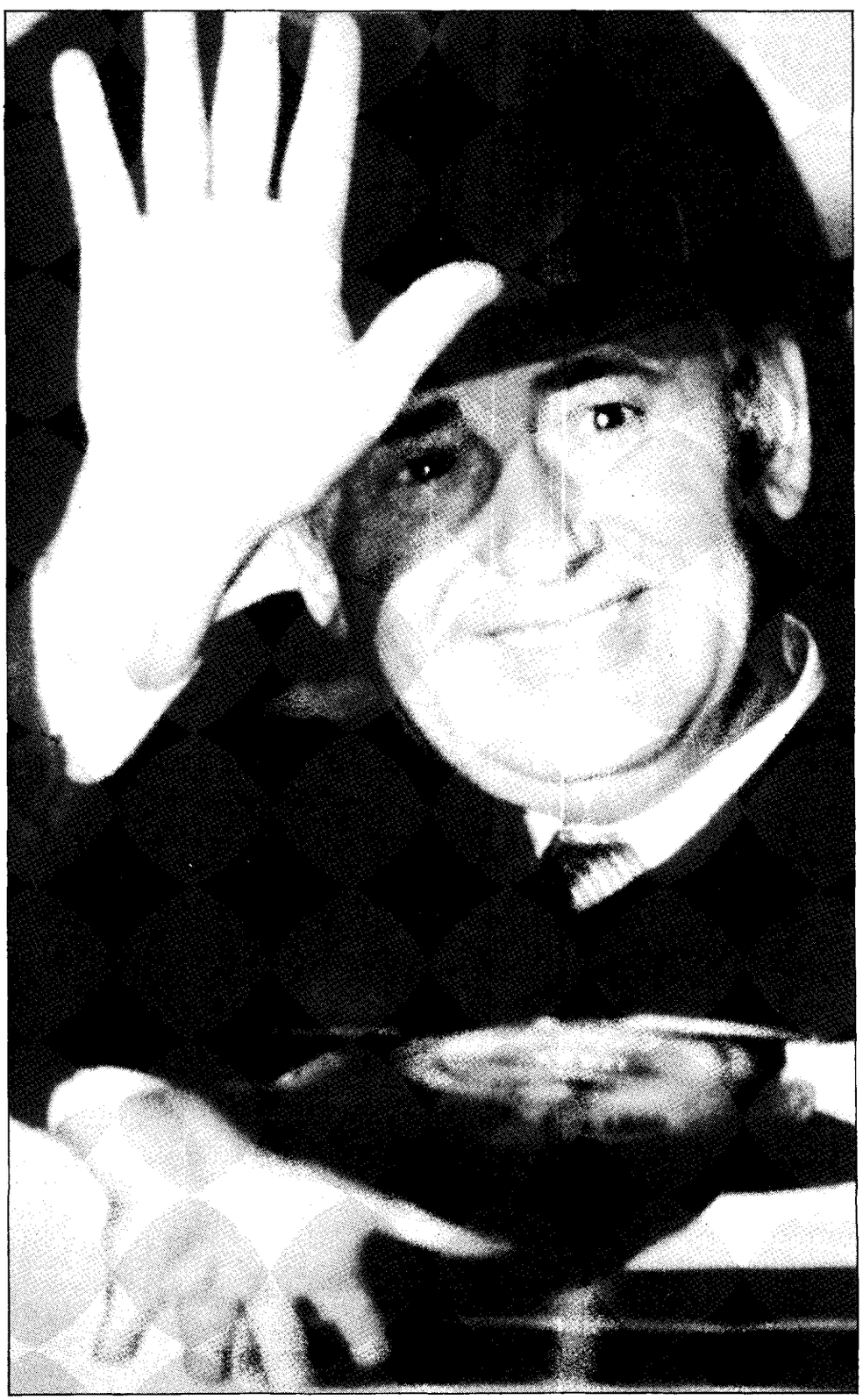
Mikhail Gorbachev: 'Adapt and survive'

A favourite phrase in Soviet politics is that people must be judged by their deeds not their words. Mikhail Gorbachev goes further and emphasises the need to join words and deeds. In his new book Perestroika *(Collins, £12.95), he says that the term perestroika (or reconstruction) 'means the unity of words and deeds . . . The essence of perestroika lies in the fact that it unites socialism with democracy'.*

Let's hope so. We must indeed judge the progress of glasnost and perestroika by their legal, political and economic results, rather than fine phrases. Yet, after decades of dogmatism, socialists can now benefit from listening to what their Soviet counterparts are saying. Even if Gorbachev and his advisers fail to overcome the opposition in the Soviet Union — and resistance is widespread and entrenched — the reformers have already changed the debate about the future. A year ago capitalism seemed supreme. Now Wall Street and the City crash while the Soviet Union legislates that workers should elect their factory managers.

On 4 November, the General Secretary addressed an international gathering, held to celebrate the Revolution's 70th birthday. A slightly abbreviated, unofficial translation of the speech is reproduced on the facing page. Its tone and content seem to confirm an important and refreshing re-orientation in Moscow. 'We do not in the least claim a monopoly on the truth.' This emphatic withdrawal of the Kremlin's previous claim to 'omniscience' opens the way to real debate. 'We welcome,' Gorbachev states in his book, 'the direct influence of numerous and diverse public movements — trades unions, youth, anti-war, or ecological movements — on international politics, an influence which has greatly increased in the last few years. They invade with their imperative demands and their sense of responsibility, what was once solely the domain of diplomacy.'

As if to prove this, Gorbachev reports that it was what he heard at the Moscow International Forum that convinced him to agree to de-couple an IMF Agreement from a settlement over Star Wars. Thus the treaty soon to be signed in Washington is attributed by the Kremlin to the influence of mainly left-wing Western opinion. If this is true, a new period has opened in world politics. For a long time all we could do about the USSR was to heave a heavy sigh and support some dissidents. Finally, the Soviets have decided to listen. To help ensure this exceptional breakthrough, the left in Europe can now return the compliment. Anthony Barnett



Anthony Barnett's own reflections about the changes in the USSR, Soviet Freedom, *will be published in the New Year by Picador.*

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WE HAVE once and for all stopped trifling with history. At times we in the Soviet Union have believed what we wanted to believe rather than what there was. But the specific features in the development of the postwar world that were accumulating and maturing became clearly visible in the 1980s.

First of all, the nuclear era has pushed to the forefront the problem of humanity's very survival. But we are also confronted by the complication of world-wide economic ties, the greater interdependence of all countries and nations, in short the world's emergence as an integral whole in a setting of diversity and contradictions — all this being stimulated by the ongoing scientific and technical revolution. And finally, by the exacerbation of global problems that are challenging human biological ability to adapt to the dangers, rates and stresses of modern living.

All this brings out new elements in the idea of 'peaceful coexistence', which require political movements to re-examine and reconsider their tasks and overcome prevailing ideological schemes and stereotypes.

That is not easy to do. No one has any ready-to-use prescriptions. It is hardly likely that anyone holds Ariadne's thread, which would help find the way out of the labyrinth of the present-day contradictory world. As we set forth our concepts of the new way of thinking, we do not in the least claim a monopoly on the truth: we are engaged in search ourselves, and invite others to look jointly for the ways by which humanity could cross the minefield of our times and emerge into a nuclear-free and non-violent world in the next century.

Certainly, in the historical perspective, it is socialism — of this we are convinced — that will make the decisive contribution to overcoming the critical elements that have arisen in the onward march of our civilisation. No other system but socialism has the potential effectively to influence the search for that Hegelian 'measure', that balance of interests, which will enable humanity to break through to a fundamentally new frontier, spelling safety for it. Socialism's potential has not yet been fully marshalled by far.

The most profound social revolution, begun in October 1919, is still under way. But its long duration, novelty, and lack of uniformity, the combination and coexistence of progressive moves and regressions, the alternation and interconnection of revolutionary and evolutionary processes, make sterile all logical schemes drawn up by the old manuals.

The logic of the social movement of our epoch is increasingly apparent. Its substance is the material and spiritual self-discrediting of the exploiting society. Neither the negative moments in socialism's history, nor the whole libraries of refuters of marxism, nor the acuteness and refinement of the ideological polemics going on in the world, have been able to upset the conclusion that capitalism has an alternative, and that this alternative is socialism.

But the diversity of development remains. At each successive spiral of history, the forces of the old world are able to mitigate the most dangerous contradictions of the moment and thus protract their rule. That is what happened, for example, when capitalism took advantage of the scientific and technical revolution. Certainly the intrinsic antagonisms of the capitalist system reproduce themselves at every new stage, but in a new and different way. The technological revolution is still at its very beginning, however, and the main consequences of its use in the capitalist way are still to come.

The fact that living socialism is so far tailing behind capitalism in technological developments has delayed our understanding of the ongoing processes. The conditions for overcoming this lag are taking shape. As *perestroika* — the revolutionary reorganisation of socialist society — makes headway, socialist society will attain a qualitatively new state. This society, the society of tomorrow that represents the higher type of socialism, will help those who are looking for a social alternative.

'Internationally, perestroika is eliminating fear of a 'Soviet threat'. Militarism is losing its vindication and the waste of resources on arms is being made even more obvious by the ecological dangers'

In my report to the meeting which celebrated the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, I spoke of two especially dangerous manifestations of capitalism's objective laws: militarisation and unequal exchange with the developing world. But they are possible only if they are backed by appropriate government policies in the capitalist states. These policies will enjoy support so long as fear of the 'Soviet threat' continues in the West and so long as people continue to believe that there are 'superior' national interests — their own — and secondary ones. In other words that there are 'subjects' of world politics and economic affairs and their 'objects'. I'm talking about neo-colonialism.

The international side of *perestroika* is eliminating fear of a 'Soviet threat'. Militarism is losing its political vindication. The unacceptable and pernicious waste of resources on armaments is becoming ever more obvious, too, in face of the ecological danger. Unemployment is also becoming a problem of an entirely different order than before in view of the new spiral of the technological revolution. Awesome signals are being issued by the financial system, which is not coping with the superburden of the arms race, astronomical state debts, and hegemonic economic egoism.

On the other hand, the new impulse for liberation now building up in the Third World is liable to explode if the developing countries do not obtain an equal place in the world economy; if the idea of a new economic world order is not carried into effect; and if the task of disarmament for development is not put on a practical footing.

These are the elements of global change in which a 'critical mass' is building up — a process which puts in question whether civilisation is to be or not to be.

It is no longer possible to consider the development of the world simply in the context of the struggle of the two opposite social systems. The dialectics of this development is a unity, a contention, a competition and interaction of a multitude of factors. In this interaction of different societies each will be put to the test — which does not mean that there can be any sort of unification or convergence between them.

We will not in the least renounce the genuine values of socialism. On the contrary, we will enrich them, while jettisoning everything that distorted the humanist content of our system. We do not expect our class adversary to become enamoured of us. We do not need that at all. We count on his reckoning with the realities. We count on his realising that we are all in the same boat, and that we must behave ourselves so that it will not capsize.

For socialism, this policy secures a merging of its class interests as a system with the interests of all humanity. And for capitalism, too, there is no other sensible way than coexistence. Joint action alone can weaken and remove the global danger of an ecological 'seizure'. The problem has long since become international.

THE COMMUNIST movement holds a worthy and prestigious place among the progressive forces of our time, but like much else in the modern world, the communist movement needs renewal and qualitative change. We were acutely aware of how socialism's international impulse was declining in the period of stagnation. So *perestroika* in the Soviet Union has become vital from this angle as well.

What is needed, if I may put it so, is a more sophisticated culture of mutual relations among progressive forces. The kind that would make it possible to accumulate all the diversity of experience and help us to appreciate the varicoloured diversity of the surrounding world and its contradictory nature.

The 'arrogance of omniscience' is a kind of fear of not being able to cope with new problems. It encourages a tenacious tendency to reject other points of view out of hand. Here there can be no dialogue, no productive discussion. And worst of all, the cause suffers. Just as not all the propositions of Marx and Engels could be dogmatically extrapolated to the imperialist epoch at the beginning of the century, so too the postulates of the fifties and sixties, let alone the thirties, are of no use in assessing the world today. A new reading is needed of the theoretical legacy of our predecessors in the name of humanity's social emancipation.

Many questions have got to be answered as we search for an alternative to the antagonistic society of capitalism and to world tensions. Our party and its theorists and scholars have begun to address these questions in earnest, jettisoning notions and schemes that were born in another time and looking at other possibilities for initiative. We invite not only fraternal parties and communists, but also socialists, social democrats and followers of other currents of political thought and action — all those who cherish the gains of the human spirit, and who want to safeguard and use them for the benefit of coming generations — to co-operate and join in the search.

This is vitally important for a new situation in which the renewal of civilisation merges with the task of ensuring the survival of the human race. The new thinking is also a new morality, a new psychology. Its aim is to ensure that, while remaining a citizen of their country, a member of their party, an activist of any progressive national movement, every person must also become aware of their responsibility for what the whole world should be and whether it is to be at all. □

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

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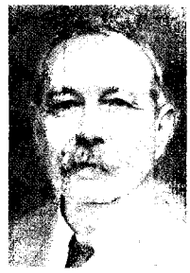
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'You'll be hearing from my solicitors . . .'

The government wants to cut the Legal Aid bill:* JOLYON JENKINS *reports on what a bad idea this is

COME THE Thatcherite Millennium, lawyers will thrive, as we trade in our political and collective rights for private contractual ones. Distant though this prospect is, it is notable that one of the few pieces of civil rights legislation passed by the Conservative government — the Data Protection Act 1984 — is only really enforceable by the ordinary citizen suing an alleged offender in the county court.

It's arguable that the New Right's model of the proper relationship between the individual and the state, and between one individual and another, makes a National Legal Service more fundamental to the aim of maximising prosperity than even the National Health Service. But if you replace the NHS with private health insurers, then what do you do if the insurers fail to meet their contractual obligations? If you can't afford to sue them, then the whole theory breaks down. There are limits to how far rights can be privatised.

The government doesn't see it quite like that. Next month the Lord Chancellor's Department will unveil its long-awaited Legal Aid Bill. Its genesis and its unstated aims are to try to cut the amount of money spent on legal aid. Legal aid last year cost the taxpayer £391.5 million; a lot of money, but governmental peanuts. (It is 0.85 per cent of the social security budget, for example.) What worries the government most of all is its rate of increase. It has multiplied nearly fourfold since 1979. It would be nice to think that there has been an increase in people's perception of their rights, and an awareness that certain problems have legal solutions.

But lawyers who work in the voluntary sector report a very low awareness of rights — though in some areas, such as consumer law, it *has* increased — and the perception of law as a tool is still the preserve of the middle classes. The increase is probably simply the result of increasing social problems: more benefit claimants, deteriorating housing, more debt. There are not many ways of controlling the legal aid budget, because it is demand-led. Most of it is already means-tested and it would be hard to tighten the eligibility rules much further: there is even now a big income trap which catches those too rich to get legal aid but too poor to pay a solicitor. Legal aid rates of pay are so low, and the administrative machinery for paying them so creaky, that many firms of solicitors no longer find it worthwhile to take on legal aid work. Barristers who relied on criminal legal aid work would find it hard to make a living.

But the Treasury insisted that money had to be saved. Last year a 'Scrutiny' team from the Treasury and the Lord Chancellor's Department came up with a few ideas, the most controversial of which was an attempt to control expenditure on the Green Form scheme. This allows a solicitor to give free legal advice and assistance up to a limit of £50 (sometimes £90); it is means-tested. The Scrutiny team thought that much of this work could be done cheaper (and in some fields more effectively) by other agencies, such as law centres and Citizen's Advice Bureaus (CABs). Social security advice was an area mentioned in the White Paper. The Solicitor General has since mentioned housing. Apart from this, legal work which was merely 'regulating one's own affairs' (an interesting and telling phrase), such as wills and conveyancing, would no longer be available on Green Form.

The advice agencies so strongly opposed the idea of taking on more work that the government relented a little. When a White Paper came out in March this year, the proposal had been changed: the bill will set up a legal aid board which will take over the responsibility for administering legal aid from the Law Society. One of its early functions will be to look at the feasibility of contracting out certain areas of Green Form work to particular agencies in individual areas. In some cases, private solicitors might run the franchises, but Nicholas Leyell has made it clear that he expects law centres and CABs to put in tenders.

So far, the advice agencies have shown no enthusiasm for putting in bids for the franchises. Partly this is because they don't believe that enough money will be on the table. They don't see why they should help central government until central government starts to help them. More fundamentally, they feel that the government has misunderstood the work they do.

Culture shock

Down in Deptford High Street last week, there was a steady stream of visitors to North Lewisham Law Centre. Deptford is the ungentrified part of London's Docklands; the law centre is a few doors down from the pawnbrokers. One of the volunteers is an articled clerk with one of the big City solicitors. Working there involves him in a degree of culture shock. 'For the clients I deal with during the week, money is no object so long as it gets the results. At the law centre I even have to supply my own pencils and paper.'

Deptford has a large black population. Most of the clients were West Indians, worried about the impending deadlines for becoming naturalised British citizens. In recent days there have been as many as 80 people queuing outside the centre, waiting for it to open. Clients were puzzled and angry at the Home Office's requirements: it's necessary to fill in a form and produce a letter from a respectable person testifying that you have been in Britain since 1972 — hard for those who were children or teenagers at the time.

Another woman was alarmed about the way the council was replacing the flat roofs on a block of flats with pitched roofs. The contractors had removed the old roof, but hadn't yet put the new one on. In the meantime the flats were unprotected. The way the centre dealt with this was instructive. A lawyer in private practice might have issued an injunction against the council, relating to that flat only. Instead, the centre lawyer was trying to liaise with all the tenants and the

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council so that the whole block could be protected.

'There is so much unmet legal need that if we simply took on individual casework in the way that private practitioners do, we wouldn't make much headway,' she says. 'We try to identify the cases which have broader ramifications, otherwise we may tell people to go to a solicitor and get the work done on Green Form.'

Law centres are scarce and unevenly distributed. There are 60 around the country, but only one in ten of the population has access to one. Their distribution bears little relation to legal need. There is only one in Scotland, one in Northern Ireland and one in Wales. One — Sandwell — closed this year, when its urban aid programme ran out.

Their money comes mostly from local authorities. The last Labour Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn Jones, undertook to fund seven directly, and this continues. The government refuses to fund any more centrally, and insists that local authorities are the best source of money, even though the centres often have to litigate *against* their paymasters. Luckily, most authorities see keeping a law centre open as a high priority, but even so there have been cuts: Deptford, for example, faces a 10 per cent reduction in money next year.

As demand has increased, law centres have had to cut down on casework: some of them now operate a virtually 'closed door' policy, where it's no longer possible for members of the public to come in off the street and ask for advice. Instead, they concentrate on campaigns to inform people about their rights, and taking up cases which, if successful, could set useful precedents. This can be a dangerous strategy. Both local and central government still like to measure effectiveness in terms of bodies through the door.

According to Gary Craig, who has just finished a research project for the Law Centres Federation: 'Definitions of what is good value for money have been captured by the Treasury, which is often seen in terms of providing the cheapest service possible. The Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department have an extremely rough-and-ready notion of how to go about evaluation.' And central government doesn't like any campaigns that look too 'political'.

> ***'On the money that will be available my CAB should be able to afford to employ about half an arm of one solicitor'***

Kate Markus, Secretary of the Law Centres Federation, says that bidding for franchises goes against the whole notion of planning for the legal needs of a population. 'With the shortage of public funds, all the agencies in an area will be bidding for whatever they can get. Agencies which have worked closely together will now find themselves in competition.' And she says that there are significant philosophical differences between legally aided work, which is geared towards private solicitors, and the community-based functions of law centres. By trying to merge the one with the other, the government has failed — perhaps deliberately — to appreciate the distinction.

Sit on the desk

Some law centre workers think that the CABs will be more kindly disposed to the government proposals. CAB folk themselves suspect the opposite: if the government tactic *is* one of covertly dividing and ruling, then it may be starting to work. But the public voice of ministers assumes that all advice agencies are the same, and ignores their very different functions.

Hove, Brighton's Siamese twin, isn't generally thought of as a deprived area. Its reputation is as a prosperous retirement ghetto. This isn't entirely correct, says Mrs Sheila Rickards, manager of the local CAB. 'There's a lot of what I call genteel deprivation.' Not all the clients are genteel either: she was once threatened with a knife in an interview cubicle. Now there are panic buttons installed, but, unlike DHSS offices, no screens.

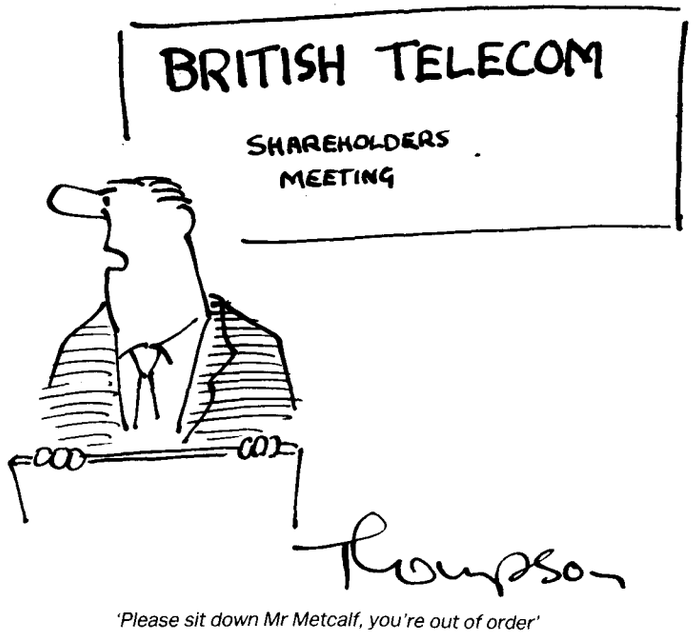
The CAB is squeezed into a tiny and obscure annexe of the town hall. The waiting room, which is also the tea-trolley corridor, has just four seats, though there are often 20 people waiting there. If there are more than two people in Mrs Rickards' office, one of them has to sit on the desk.

Her staff of 2½ paid workers (including herself) and 32 part-time volunteers had 16,000 enquiries last year. The largest single category of enquiry was housing, property and land — troubles with unscrupulous landlords in Hove's large private rented sector. (Nationally, social security enquiries come top.) The enquiry rate increases remorselessly year by year: it's nearly double what it was in 1976-77. Mrs Rickards says that clients' problems have changed: 'We used to have people who had moved into the area who wanted a list of societies they could join. Now that people have to wait for an hour to see us, only those with real problems bother.'

Mrs Rickards is a resourceful woman. She persuaded American Express to sponsor a portable microfiche reader, so that she and her workers can take the national CAB database into local hospitals and outlying villages. The CAB's annual report is sponsored by Allied Dunbar. But even commonplace new-tech machines like microcomputers or word processors are completely out of the question.

None of Mrs Rickards' staff are lawyers, but many of the subjects they deal with are ones which a rich client would go to a solicitor for. For 'pure' legal problems she can call on local solicitors who will give free advice; otherwise there is always Green Form. She is alarmed at the franchise proposals. 'On the money that will be available, my CAB should be able to afford to employ about half an arm of one solicitor.' Suppose Brighton CAB gets the local franchise. 'That means I will have to send people over to Brighton to get housing legal advice, instead of passing them over to a local solicitor. For some of the people who come in here, the £1 bus fare to Brighton is more than they can afford.'

The root problem with the legal aid plans is that they spring from a lack of vision. Conservative ministers, for whom the family solicitor is an all-purpose 'fixer', adviser and Samaritan, use that inappropriate paradigm for all legal and quasi-legal advice, and then discover that it costs too much. If they were properly funded, law centres and CABs would be far more cost-effective. Mrs Rickards puts her finger on it. 'What I resent most of all,' she says, 'is the attempt to turn us into poor men's solicitors.' □



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How to nobble the Thatcher vote

Ben Pimlott says that the Liberals gain much from an electoral pact and Labour little. But, argues* MICHAEL STEED, *both would gain equally from a pact which could prevent a fourth term of Thatcherism

ELECTORAL pacts are not on the agenda either for Labour or the Liberals (nor, indeed, for any new party that may come out of merger negotiations). But it's an issue both parties will have to face sooner or later, and it is better faced with sober facts and rational calculation. Ben Pimlott's claim in last week's *New Statesman* that 'Liberals, of course, have much to gain and little to lose' while Labour 'has a significant amount to lose and nothing at present to gain' hardly fits this requirement.

It is the sort of knee-jerk assumption that anyone who wants to promote the idea of a Lab-Lib pact must recognise is widespread in the Labour Party. Funnily enough, a similar reaction (but the other way round) is just as common in the Liberal Party. Both reactions are half right, but also half wrong. The two parties do both have a lot to lose. But both also may have much to gain.

Does standing down for another party in some seats reduce the chances of winning new votes? This is Labour's biggest fear, and understandably so. A pact could be seen as an advertisement that Labour does not expect to gain enough ground to win an overall majority — which could, in turn, be critically damaging to its credibility if it ever began to approach that level of support. Exactly the same will doubtless be said by supporters of the new party. Past Alliance surges make such a hope not totally unrealistic.

Psephological commonsense must give much more weight to Labour's concern on this score. But psephological realism must equally recognise that only the Conservative Party has more than a slim chance of winning an overall majority next time,'anyway.

The conclusion for an anti-Tory may be that any pact must be strictly limited to allow both parties still to fight for an overall majority on their own as well. As it happens a pact designed solely to stop the Conservatives winning a majority of seats on only 40 per cent of the vote (rather than defeating as many Tory MPs as possible) could be limited in just that way.

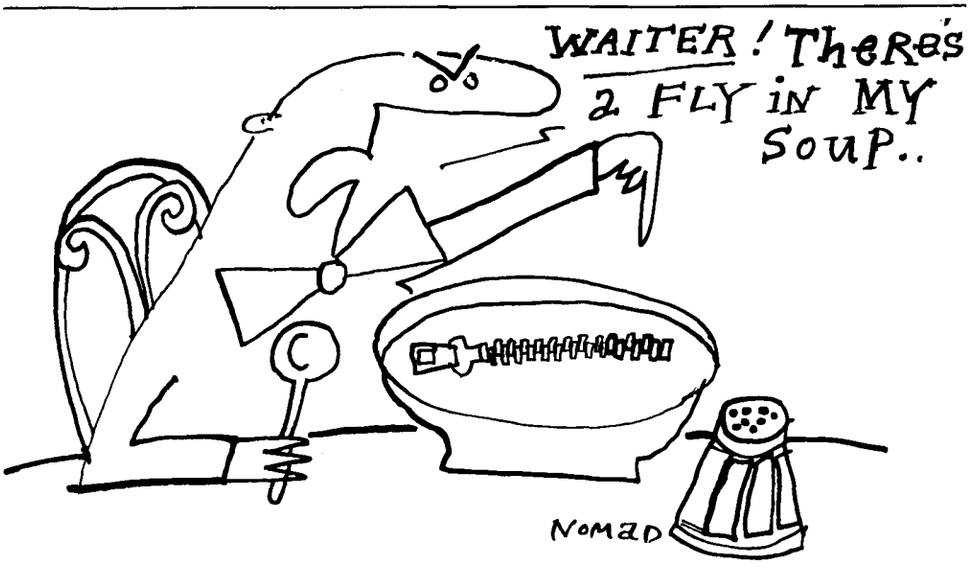
A limited deal of this kind would require the surrender of 30 or so carefully selected seats on either side, leaving each party fighting over 600. Could this be presented as a form of insurance, thus not inhibiting or damaging a Labour thrust for outright victory?

Alliance anti-socialists

The next calculation is whether a pact might lose a party existing support. This is hardly a problem for Labour. But many Alliance voters in 1987 were more anti-socialist than anti-Tory. We have no way of estimating reliably how many of these might be repelled by Lib-Labbery. The Callaghan-Steel deal certainly lost the Liberals a lot of votes in 1977. Owenite splinter candidates would be eager to mop up such votes.

Furthermore, most Liberal MPs outside the Scottish Highlands have won their seats by biting deeply into the natural Tory vote. Even were a pact made, some of them would for this reason distance themselves from it. So will many Labour MPs, but for very different reasons.

Thus those wanting to see a pact must recognise that it would carry a very substantial risk for the Liberal Party (or its successor), and particularly for many of its sitting MPs. On the calculation so far then, both parties have a lot to lose, on a not dissimilar scale.



There is another loss locally. Both parties would fear weakening their future strength, particularly in local council elections, in the seats where they withdrew. Superficially that effect can be balanced by each sacrificing the same number of seats. Yet it is not so simple. The 1987 Alliance vote in the typical Conservative-Labour marginal was between 15 and 20 per cent. But in the typical Conservative-Liberal marginal, the Labour vote has mostly already been squeezed down to 10 per cent or less. Thus the Liberals would be giving up bigger votes, and their local councillors play a more powerful role in the party.

Naturally, both parties would be more reluctant to withdraw where they are strong locally, although in third place last June. Yet these seats are typically those where the Conservatives are most vulnerable to pacting (or tactical voting). Some careful trading (or impartial calculating) of such local losses for the prospective gains could be the answer.

The crucial question is how far previous Labour and Alliance voters would follow the discipline of a pact. A large number of Liberal-SDP voters are likely to refuse to switch to Labour. Just how many? In the past the Liberal vote in seats without a Liberal candidate has split close to 50:50 between the two big parties. But the split has been a bit pro-Tory when Labour is in power, and drifted more towards Labour under a Conservative government. There is no direct evidence for the 1987 Alliance vote (since every seat was fought), but the squeeze on third-placed Alliance voters in marginals did work slightly in Labour's favour. The natural inclination of the 1987 Alliance vote is 55:45 to Labour. With a pact, and some persuasion, that could probably become 60:40; anything above 65:35 would be highly optimistic. A net effective transfer of one-third of the Alliance vote to Labour is an upper limit.

Labour voters should move more readily to a Liberal candidate, though some will find a reason not to. A similar upper limit might be a 90:10 split, or a net transfer of four-fifths. So Labour apparently has much more to give and the Liberals much more to gain. Yet if we assume a pact in every seat to the benefit of whoever was second in 1987, and apply these transfer figures, we get 32 Labour gains and 29 Alliance. How can the gains be so equal?

Two reasons. First, four-fifths of a low (say, 10 per cent) Labour vote has the same power to wipe out a Tory lead of 8 per cent as one-third of a higher third-place Alliance vote (24 per cent). Next, Tory leads over the Alliance tend to be bigger than where Labour is the challenger.

The simulation above of a maximum pact and transfers produces a toll of 61 Tory seats. This is unrealistic. More plausible simulations suggest that about 40 is the most the parties could really expect. That would not have been enough to have changed the outcome in 1987, when the Conservatives won with only 43 per cent of the vote. But if the Tory share came down to about 40 per cent it would decide whether or not we had a Conservative government into the mid-1990s.

There probably won't be a pact. For each party, taken on its own, a tangible hope of 15 to 20 extra seats counts for less than the intangible fears and risks. But the balance of benefit and loss is remarkably similar for both — and a pact could stop Mrs Thatcher winning a 'fourth term' at the next election. □

Michael Steed was Liberal/SDP Alliance candidate for Burnley in 1983.

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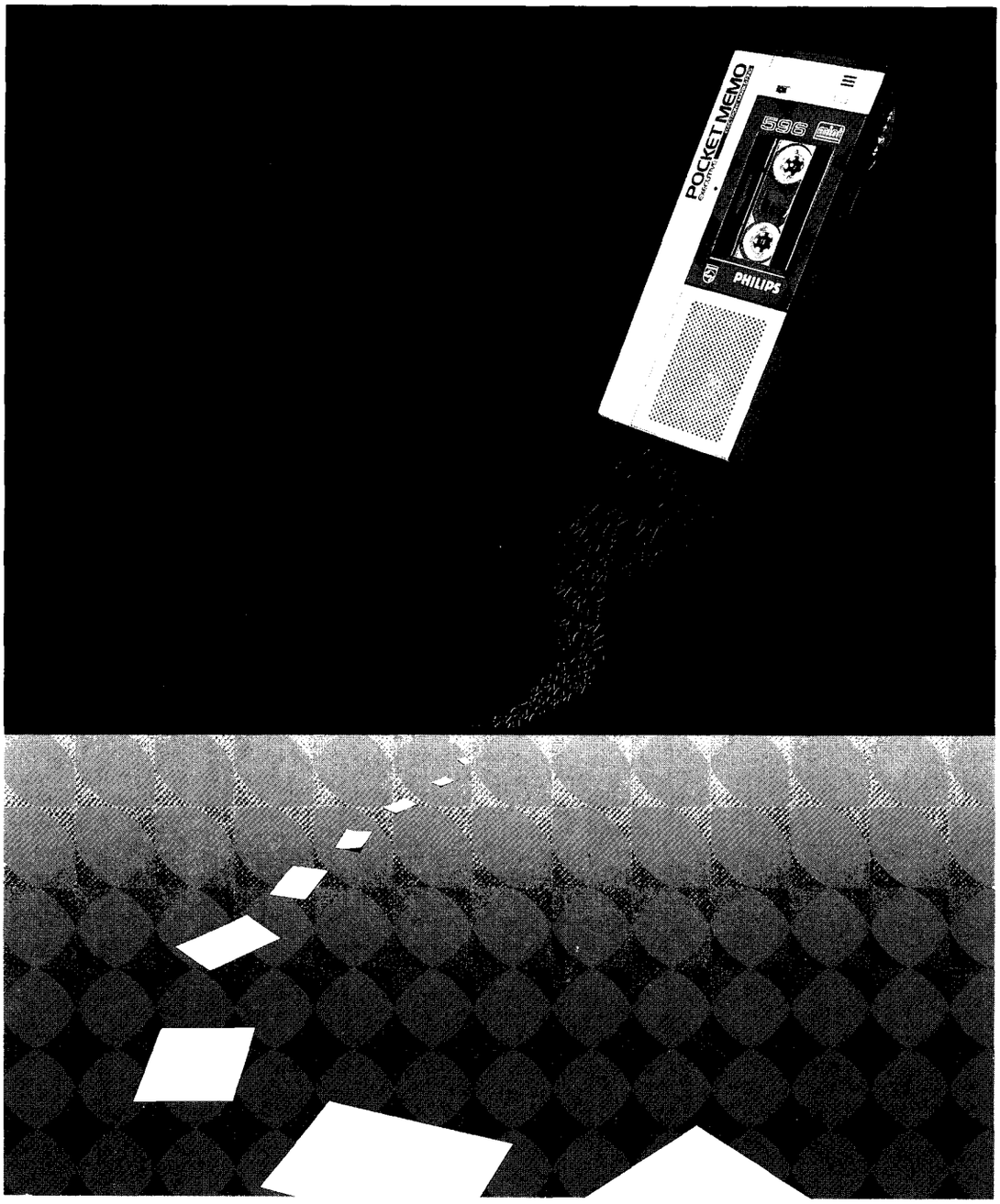

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Will Channel 4 make the Grade?

Two months ago he said Channel 4 should be sold off. Now he says it shouldn't.* JOHN ELLIS *explains

MICHAEL GRADE was appointed Chief Executive of Channel 4 last week because the BBC is beating ITV in the ratings. The appointment has little to do with the needs of Channel 4, which is why the all-purpose nullity word 'charisma' was wheeled out to explain it. The bosses of ITV, who dominate Channel 4's board (because they allegedly pay for it), wanted to inflict grave damage on the newly successful and popular BBC. Grade is credited with the BBC's programme renaissance, because of his scheduling skills and his strong backing for sometimes controversial programmes. Now ITV has him back where he can do it no harm.

The hand of Paul Fox, Yorkshire TV's managing director and ITV's legendary fixer, can be discerned behind this appointment (just as it can behind the week's other appointment of a man who didn't apply for the job: Alan Coren as editor of the *Listener*). The disturbing thing is that (almost) the entire board of Channel 4 acquiesced. Cynical short-term moves like poaching the opposition's key management have long-term consequences. Who now can trust Channel 4's board to preserve the distinctive character of the Channel's output?

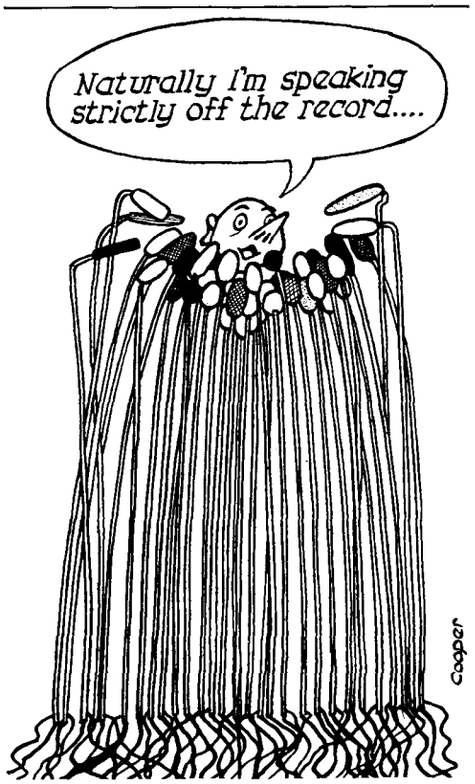
There certainly were long faces among independent producers last week. Some were desperately seeking for the good side of Grade: the time when, as programme controller of LWT, he persuaded the ITV network to take Verdi's *Requiem* from Southern TV, not the move of a simple populist. Or his recent time in American TV production, where he sought to establish Embassy TV as a producer of quality programmes, with all the difficulties that involved in a down-market environment like American TV.

Change of mind

But one thing rankles. At the Royal Television Society's September Convention, he argued that Channel 4 should be floated off from its current connections with ITV and become a direct competitor with it for a mass audience. Two months to the day later he declares himself in favour of closer links with ITV and not altering the Channel's distinctive, winning formula. When *Newsnight* asked him about this apparent change of mind, he explained that as the BBC was paying him in September he spoke in their interests. In other words, he was advocating a spoiling operation rather like that of his appointment by ITV's block vote to the Channel 4 post. But as Channel 4's Chief Executive, Grade will need a more principled, broader perspective to guide it through the momentous changes broadcasting will undergo during his five-year contract. Whether Grade can produce and hold to such a perspective is crucial to Channel 4's future, especially since the Channel's Board has proved itself such a supine body.

Grade shares certain key features with his predecessor Jeremy Isaccs, the architect of Channel 4. Like Isaacs, Grade is a dogged fighter against censorship in drama. Grade's determination was key to the BBC's firm stand during the furore over *The Singing Detective* and *The Monocled Mutineer*. But, a little like Isaacs, Grade's determination when it comes to issues in the public political arena seems more tempered. Like Isaacs again, he has championed progressive social causes at the BBC, commissioning (single) programmes on TV's coverage of women and blacks. Like Isaacs, he does not tolerate fools or woolly ideas gladly. And he has something of Isaac's commitment and intimate knowledge of the work of making TV programmes. People who have worked under Grade's management value and respect his advice, and speak of the fundamental security he provides in his support for projects.

Unlike Isaacs, though, Grade is always tempted to be a showman and a crowd-pleaser. He is a commercial animal, who still has to prove his fundamental commitment to Channel 4's brief to promote 'innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes'. His experience has been almost entirely as a bright and energetic promoter at the more popular end of the market; and as a genius of the schedule.



Of course there can be no doubt that Channel 4's schedule could do with an overhauling. Mid-evenings are dull and predictable; adventurous programmes are routinely pushed to the margins; ITV's priorities dominate (eg Channel 4 mustn't put a documentary on 'against' *News at Ten*); programmes come in odd combinations; promotion is clumsy. Grade's advent will certainly change the scheduling; but whether for the better depends on the perspective he develops for the Channel.

Cultural politics

Though he would run a mile or more from the term, his priority must be to develop a clear cultural politics for the Channel. Many good things have been tried out, and many let drop without adequate follow-up. John 'I'm the Channel's token rightwinger' Ranelagh has made the telling point that Channel 4 devoted a month to showing Japanese TV programmes, but has no long-term policy priorities for its coverage (if any) of the Far East and the Pacific Rim. Such examples can be multiplied: no policy about the showing of cinema films; no policy about perspectives on the Third World; no policy on drama series; no policy on showing of archive TV; no policy on the arts; no policy on having a policy. For the commissioning editors who are the core of Channel 4 have recently drifted off into separate areas; there has been no attempt to bring them together, even informally, to share notes or discuss broad issues.

Grade has to move fast to improve this situation, and prove his commitment to the difficult and often unpopular kinds of programmes that various commissioning editors have championed. He cannot transfer many of the habits he has learnt in mainstream TV, because a lot of Channel 4 is precisely about doing things differently. But one habit, that of the demand for clarity in the working out and statement of objectives, will be vital in setting programming priorities. It will also be vital in the wider and more difficult work of charting Channel 4 and its ITV-dominated board through the difficult years to come.

There is plenty of unprincipled support for the severing of links with ITV, as well as a more principled support for the idea, generated by the widespread disgust at the way Grade's appointment was brought about. The risks involved in breaking those links abruptly seem too great. A wiser strategy would be to phase out the pernicious aspects of the links: breaking ITV's hold over Channel 4's schedule and output; replacing much of ITV's weight on the board with independent producers; and ending the selling of Channel 4's advertising time by the same sales forces that sell for ITV. Separate selling forces within the ITV companies are feasible, and, incidentally, would prove whether Channel 4 is financially viable without taking the risk of floating it off. It would also satisfy the government's demand for competition to revitalise the selling of TV ad slots, as the Channel 4 dedicated sales teams would quickly evolve new selling strategies.

Such general policy issues demand strong leadership (as Grade gave BBC TV), but also a principled and dedicated leadership. Grade will have to provide this as it is certainly not going to come from the present Channel 4 board. It is to be hoped that Grade can find in himself the new skills this task demands. □

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The goon show

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS *reports on the miserable megalomania of President Duarte*

San Salvador, El Salvador

THE FOLLOWING exchange took place at President José Napoleón Duarte's press conference in San Salvador on 29 October, three days after the murder of Herbert Anaya, who headed the country's unofficial Human Rights Commission.

Douglas Farah (United Press International): 'Mr President, I would like to know why you think you will be able to investigate the killing of Mr Anaya when there are tens of thousands of political murders in the past years you have been unable to resolve?'

Duarte: 'The question is irrelevant. It seems to me rather to be an insinuation. I came to power three years ago and since that time I have been trying to reduce to a minimum the process of criminality that had opened in the country. You cannot demand of me investigations in a state which all Salvadorans recognise as a time of gigantic tension, as in the US you cannot demand — I do not know if you are North American, but tell me who killed Kennedy or who killed Lincoln? And I could mention many other cases of people who were killed and the case never solved.'

One could make a number of observations about this reply. First, of course, we do know who killed Abraham Lincoln. And, though many Americans do indeed go missing every year, it is rare to find that they have been kidnapped and murdered by the Highway Patrol or by an auxiliary police officer attached to the Internal Revenue Service. Then one has to notice the uncharacteristic modesty of the second sentence. Duarte has only been President of El Salvador for 3½ years, but before that he was the leading civilian member of the ruling junta. His time in office coincided with the death or disappearance of no fewer than 30,000 of his fellow citizens, and of at least six Americans as well.

If Duarte were anything like as popular in El Salvador as he is in the United States, he would be a very successful politician indeed. What is striking about him is the extent to which he believes in his own image: an image as reflected on covers of *Time* magazine rather than in Salvadoran hearts and minds. On his last visit to Washington in October he contrived to embarrass even his fulsome hosts by stooping and kissing the American flag. There is hardly a wall in San Salvador that does not bear an ironic tribute, in poster or graffito form, to this abject gesture. (Not even Oliver North *kisses* the flag.)

Duarte is suffering from an advanced case of the Sadat syndrome; an affliction for which there is no known cure. Typically, the victim begins to count political success in terms of the number of foreign celebrities visited or received. Cravings for American military aid are experienced, and become tragically harder to assuage even when the dosage is increased to life-threatening levels. One dinner at the White House starts to equal 50 meetings with domestic political groups. (A dinner at the White House *with wife* equals a hundred such humdrum encounters.) The sufferer will start to fetishise editorials in American newspapers, while ignoring the humbler indigenous prints — an admittedly easy task in San Salvador, where *La Cronica del Pueblo* and *El Independiente* have been bombed and closed and their editors butchered. In the final stages of the syndrome, the patient will begin to make excuses for the Reagan administration that even the administration itself is too shy to offer.

Duarte's story

I would judge President Duarte to be verging on the terminal. Even before the flag-kissing photo-opportunity, he had accused the Sandinista government in Nicaragua of being responsible for the civil war in El Salvador, a claim that no Washington hawk has had the face to make. He has stated publicly that he was quite unaware of the use of Ilopango Air Force base for the illegal supply of the *contra* forces. Ilopango is 20 minutes by car from the centre of San Salvador and is the headquarters of the Salvadoran Air Force.

If Duarte did not know that it was being used to attack Nicaragua, then he has effectively ceded power to an arrogant foreign patron. If he *did* know — while affirming the contrary and while claiming that the flow of arms was in the other direction — then he has effectively ceded power to an arrogant foreign patron.

Other details are significant too. In true Sadat style, Duarte has 'written' a book entitled *Duarte: My Story*. This volume was co-authored with Diana Page, and published only in English.

When Sadat produced a similar book in the aftermath of his Nobel Prize, he was careful to excise most of the shady political past he had described in an earlier volume. Duarte, who is envious of President Arias's Nobel Prize and who claims credit for the Arias 'peace process', chiefly imputes shadiness to others. He contrives to imply that many of the death squad killings have been the work of the left, seeking to magnify the contradictions. Experience and investigation have shown that there is no need to simulate rightist atrocities in El Salvador. I had the opportunity to ask Maria Julia Hernandez, the tireless head of the human rights office *Tutela Legal* at the Archbishopric, if she thought that the guerrillas had indeed been shooting the civilian opposition as a provocation. Her pretended merriment did not mask her contempt for the suggestion.

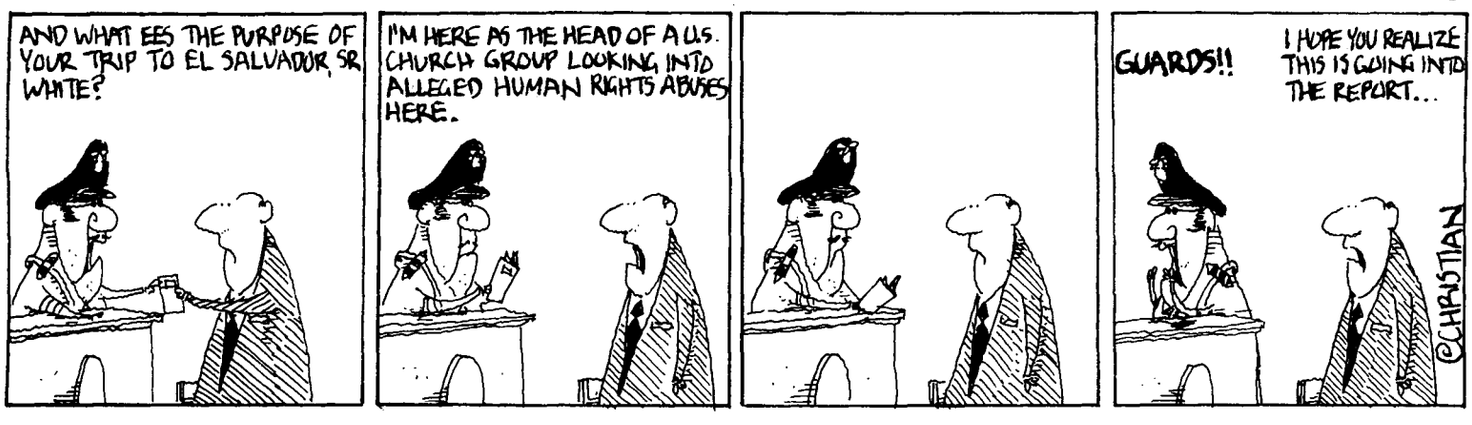
On 15 November, the last Sunday of my stay, Archbishop Rivera y Damas preached a homily in which he warned that the death squads were back in business. He gave details of several cases, including the murder of a church worker. Common to all the cases, according to *Tutela Legal*, is the involvement of army and police personnel in the slayings. President Duarte is forced to describe complaints and questions of this type as 'irrelevant'. He has taken the side of the armed forces, who have a short way with politicians who are half-hearted about them.

When Ambassador Edwin Corr said that he saw his job in El Salvador as 'making sure the cattle get to Cheyenne' he had hit on more than a phrase with which to offend all Salvadorans. He was trying to say that there would be no military coup on his watch. In a way, there hasn't been one. And in a way, there has. The armed forces have annexed the Christian Democrats without the trouble of a seizure of the Presidential palace.

A report by the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus of Congress*, issued a few days after the Archbishop's sermon, puts the same point in more restrained language. American aid, it concludes, has been misused and diverted. Instead of going to the reconstruction of the miserably poor country, it has been employed on the aggrandisement of the army and the prosecution of a war on the poor. This is the conclusion to which several years of Presidential 'certification' have led. It's difficult to say which is the more deluded — a Reagan who thinks Duarte is El Salvador or a Duarte who believes that Reagan is the United States. □

**Bankrolling Failure: United States Policy in El Salvador & the Urgent Need for Reform*, by Senator Mark Hatfield, Representive Jim Leach and Representative George Miller.

This article is reprinted from the New York Nation.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'They play such terrible head games'

The disruption at CND's conference is part of a 12-year story of guilt-tripping negativism.

JANE DIBBLIN *reports; extra research by Lyn Barlow*

A HEATED row between women from Wages for Housework, with their new converts at Yellow Gate, and most of the rest of Greenham women has spilled over into CND. It dominated both plenary sessions at its conference last weekend and press coverage of the event.

The Wages for Housework group says Greenham women — and some individuals in particular — are racist. Greenham women, in return, report a 'kangaroo trial' lasting seven hours of women said to be racist, and vicious verbal attacks on those who don't agree with the tactics of Wages for Housework.

This small, tightly-knit group is based in King's Cross Women's Centre, also the home of Wages Due Lesbians, the English Collective of Prostitutes, *Sex, Race and Class*, Women Against Rape, Housewives in Dialogue, Black Women for Wages for Housework and others. They share a great deal in common: the same methods, same politics and virtually the same members.

This is the first time that a row involving one of the groups has hit the headlines in such a big way. Yet the core groups have been at work for over 12 years; mention their names and most long-standing feminists, black, white, lesbian or straight, will groan.

Despite its longevity, Wages for Housework (which is how I will refer to it as this was the original group) has hardly grown in size, generally consisting of 25 to 30 women, though hundreds have passed through its 'lower ranks'. It is very hierarchical; the most powerful women within the organisation remain constant: Selma James, a North American woman who has lived in Britain since 1960; Wilmette Brown, also North American, a former member of the Black Panthers, who came to Britain in the late '70s; Suzie Flemming, an academic based in Bristol, mainstay of the Falling Wall Press which publishes Wages for Housework tracts and Anne Neale, leader of Wages Due Lesbians. Said one former adherent, who was frightened to be named: 'The central authority gives the orders and tells you what to do and think — no one is allowed to stray from the "proper analysis".'

Rather than building a following and platform for their demands, Wages for Housework has consistently chosen to latch onto other organisations. Its major achievement has been trails of destruction left in its wake; although Greenham and CND appear to be weathering the storm, many smaller movements have disappeared or ossified.

How have they managed to do this? And what are their politics? What is their purpose? It's difficult to know whether to describe them as a sort of cult, a women's movement version of the Moonies or a fanatic, sectarian left-wing group, like the Workers' Revolutionary Party. Finally, where do they get the money to send delegates to every possible conference, including Nairobi and Copenhagen?

> *'The real issue of racism is devalued and obscured as people begin to realise they are being manipulated'*

The central demand of Wages for Housework is believed to have its roots in Italy, in a women's group of the late '60s, early '70s, called *Lotta Feminista* and in the work of one theoretician in particular, Maria Rosa Dalla Costa. In an essay 'The power of women and the subversion of the community', Dalla Costa argued that the capitalist system was predicated upon women freely servicing workers (husband) and workers-to-be (children). The answer was not, she reasoned, for women to get a job outside the home; then they would be servicing capital both directly and indirectly. Dalla Costa didn't present any clear alternative but exhorted the women's movement to 'find modes of struggle' to challenge this 'double slavery' — however, groups formed in Western Europe and the USA which put forward the demand for wages for housework as a solution to the problem.

This demand was debated in the wider women's movement in Britain and the USA in the '70s but gained little support: critics pointed out that it was in danger of entrenching women's role in the home and that it was, in any case, an over-economistic analysis of women's oppression. Women's poverty was better addressed by fighting for unemployment benefit for married women or for a guaranteed minimum income for all.

Vanguard of hookers

Wages for Housework's few supporters, meanwhile, were arguing that the position of the ordinary woman was akin to that of a prostitute, only she didn't get paid for her services: 'lesbians and hookers ,' said Wilmette Brown, were 'two backs to one coin' (*Gay News*, March 1979). 'One woman is saying "No, I don't want to sleep with men" and the other is saying "If I'm going to have sex with men I want to be paid for it"'. Prostitutes and lesbians, they reasoned, were at the forefront of the fight against capitalism; hence Wages Due Lesbians and the English Collective of Prostitutes.

Like Dalla Costa's original thesis, these ideas have a certain immediate impact, as all simplistic and reductionist ideas do. Moreover, the groups failed to build a solid movement among lesbians or prostitutes, on behalf of whom they claimed to speak. Solicitor Jane Deighton says that prostitutes in King's Cross told her that 'if ever they approached the English Collective of Prostitutes for legal advice, ECP would insist on mediating between them and solicitors so they could control the women — like pimps really.'

ECP's reply is that because women are constantly divided into the 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' — and therefore don't unite — and because some women are victimised for who they are, it is up to all women to call ourselves prostitutes and lesbians. But in practice this denies the differences between women's experiences and thus becomes devoid of power. More importantly, it has been used opportunistically by Wages for Housework supporters, claiming to belong to whichever oppressed group seemed expedient. Witnesses claim they even turned up at one conference with pillows stuffed up their jumpers, asking to speak 'as pregnant women'. As one former supporter put it: 'It's always the same group of women, year in year out, appearing at every conference, claiming to be a prostitute one day, a factory worker the next, a claimant mother the next.'

How do they do it?

How is it that such a small — if hard-working — group can cause so much disruption? First, its leaders are extremely articulate, charismatic speakers. They choose a point on which the group in question is genuinely weak: in recent years it has been racism, previously it was often class awareness. Much of the women's movement and the peace movement has been oriented towards white middle-class people and their needs and views: so when a group such as Wages for Housework cynically uses racism as a lever there is a mass of guilt to plug in to.

When they come up against a black person who disagrees with them, they accuse them of being a 'lackey to the white bourgeoisie': this happened to Shirley Andrews, joint-head of the GLC women's committee, and to Linda Bellos, head of Lambeth Council.

Second, Wages for Housework has also put a higher premium on efficiency and on press coverage than most women's groups do. 'They would arrive at a march organised by other women with banners and loud speakers, give everyone the line and get the press to interview them,' said a former member.

Liz Kelly, formerly of the Rape in Marriage campaign: 'We worked for six months to launch a private member's bill on the issue: when we held a

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meeting in the Commons, Women Against Rape turned up, claimed to have organised it and seized the press coverage. From then on our energy was diverted into limiting the damage they did: all our work went down the drain. It just demoralised us.'

Third, it has exploited the deliberate lack of formal structure of grassroots women's organisations. Hydra-like, Wages for Housework's plethora of identities gives it an entry into most women's organisations with their lack of rules, their open-door policies and their ways of working which emphasise equality: that everyone must be listened to and their criticisms taken seriously. It then tries to impose its own leadership. Rebecca Johnson, a Greenham veteran, unsuccessfully courted by Wages for Housework and now one of its prime targets: 'Women listened and tried to understand what was going on precisely because we felt that racism was such a serious issue . . . but the whole purpose was to intimidate, attack and undermine: "We won't permit you to continue at CND, we won't permit you to continue at Greenham unless you accept the leadership of Wilmette Brown" . . . any questioning of Wilmette is by definition racist.'

This goes some way to explain its success in gaining converts in targeted organisations. Wages for Housework leaders are brilliant speakers and powerful personalities, they use this charisma to shine a torch on a couple of women, as they have at Greenham, and announce that only they have any understanding of racism — or whatever the topic of the day. Flattery always finds friends.

Other women are cultivated for the credibility they can lend Wages for Housework. One woman who worked with them for several years and was then thrown out said: 'I realised that as a working-class mother and a lesbian I'd been brought in to lend credibility to what they were saying and to give them an inroad to these communities. I'd been used. They wooed me and they became like my family.'

She was 'excommunicated' when the group decided her politics did not match theirs. 'I was grilled by a number of them, it was if they were my judge and jury. It was very frightening, they play such terrible head games. Afterwards I was terribly disappointed: I felt as if I'd spent years working on a false premise.'

Whence the cash?

Given their net effect and given their seemingly endless resources to travel widely and devote themselves full-time to their group, rumours have long since speculated that Wages for Housework has received foreign funding. There is no concrete evidence to support the claim, however. The groups around the Kings Cross Women's Centre have received funding in the past from the GLC and from Camden Council — £34,000 to Housewives in Dialogue and *Sex, Race and Class* this year, for example. On this they managed to send delegates to Nairobi for the UN Decade of Women conference as well as it going on day-to-day expenditure. According to a former adherent, only the inner clique is allowed to know anything about their finances. 'But they are very good at bringing the odd wealthy woman into their confidence and getting money out of them'. Certainly, they appear not to be too fussy who they make alliances with, despite claims to be the true revolutionaries. Tory peer Baroness Vickers has been wooed by them and Sonya Copeland, a Tory member of the GLC women's committee, voted with them.

Wherever their money comes from, it is the way that they use it which has stirred up criticism. Apart from diverting energy which would otherwise be put into campaigning, their most insidious effect has been to degrade the issues of race and class — the very issues which, say their defenders, 'they first brought up at a time when no one else wanted to know'. Under a constant barrage of charges of 'racism', groups tend to collapse in self-doubt; as they realise they are being manipulated, people begin to close their ears to the taunts and jibes. Hence the real issue of racism is devalued and obscured. Wilmette Brown has made some pertinent and useful points about CND: about its low emphasis on internationalism, its sometimes narrow definition of 'peace' and of 'non-alignment' (focusing on opposition to NATO instead of developing strategies for closer ties with the Third World-led non-aligned movement). The danger is now that the wrecking tactics of her group will also serve to discredit these issues.

Indeed, what Wages for Housework says it stands for and what it does are curiously disjointed: the two just don't add up. It shares certain characteristics with left-wing entryist groups but the latter have an internal logic and try to run campaigns. At the same time it is something of a cult — but devotes more attention to destroying others than acquiring mass conversions. As its members were asked — but failed to answer — at the CND conference last weekend: what *do* they ultimately want? □

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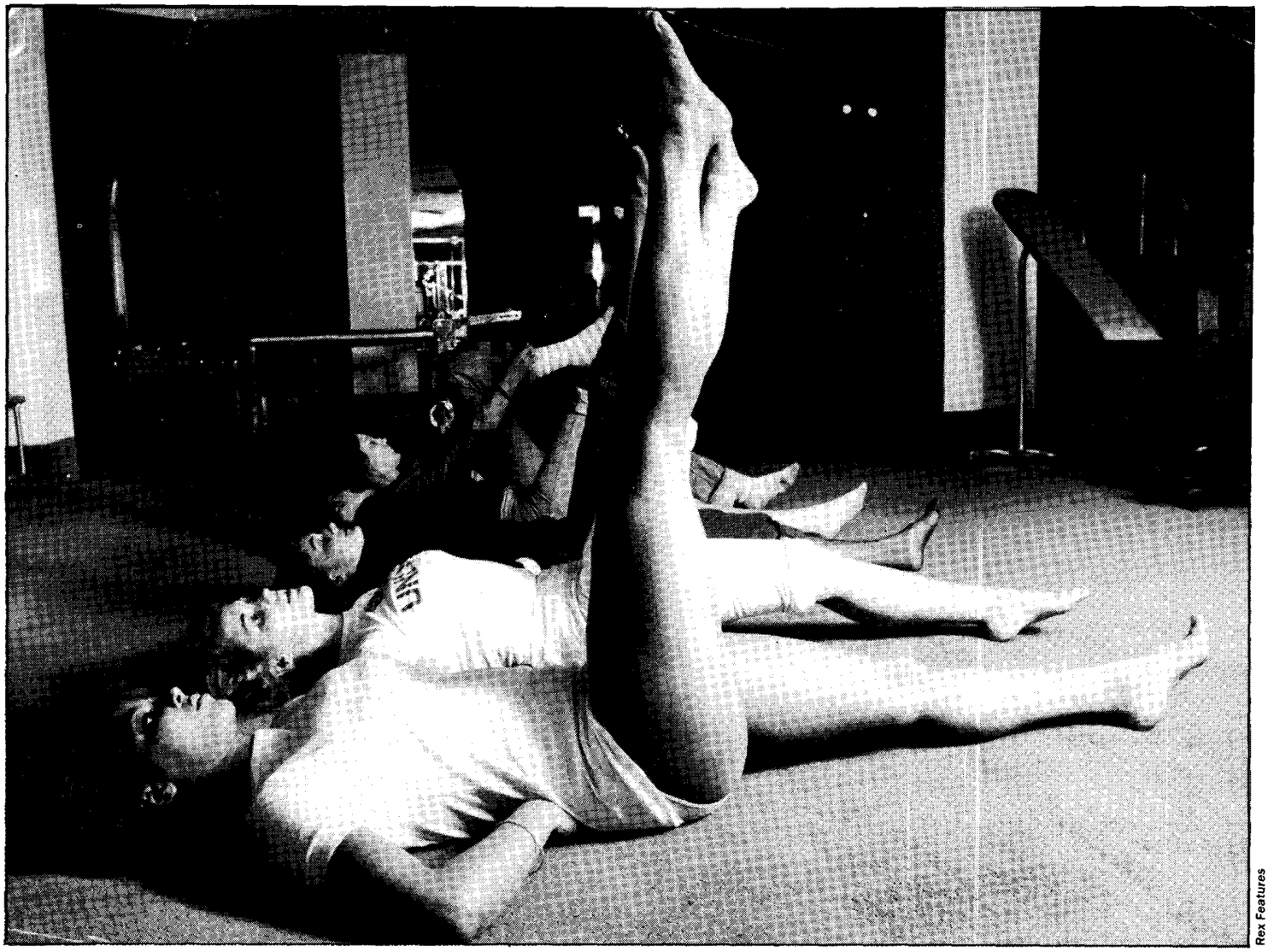

Rex Features

ESSAY

Look after yourself

Calory counting, jogging, aerobics: is personal fitness our desperate solution, asks* HILARY BICHOVSKY-LITTLE, *to the threats of radioactivity and global pollution?

DECEMBER'S *Living* magazine divulges some royal fitness secrets: Diana likes jazz-dancing and tennis, Prince Charles does Canadian air-force exercises daily, while the Queen, when she gets the chance, likes to 'stride across the moors with her gun dogs'.

On television, all presenters, especially of food programmes and exercise slots, have been giggling self-effacingly about their waistlines for at least a decade and marathon runs have been institutionalised as friendly items of news. Add to this the fact that the Kodak Olympic Gold Collection invites you to celebrate the 1988 Olympics by buying some white sports clothes and a head-band, or maybe a Tunturi Ergometer W3 exercise bike (£225), and that British Steel has launched an advertising campaign featuring a manly man in boxer shorts doing pull-ups to a voice-over which speaks of the company becoming 'leaner, tougher, more flexible' (ITV, 7 November), and you have some idea how mainstream the cultivation of Health 'n' Fitness has become.

Around those TV presenters' waistlines there hovers a small but persistent confusion which elides health/fitness with appearance/slimness at every turn, particularly for women. In *Running Together: Everywoman's Running Guide*, author Alison Turnbull suggests, 'Dig out or have taken a photo of yourself looking your oldest, fattest, spottiest, most awful. Stick it in your training diary as a reminder of the things you most want to change.' Obviously the fitness cult is not *restricted* to women. Men are also being exhorted to get fit — and, by implication, change shape — but, although fitness appears to make one appeal to the two sexes, it could not possibly do so for the simple reason that its focus is the body. For women, calls to achieve a fit body enmesh, as Ros Coward expresses it, with a pre-existing agenda of femininity which has always insisted 'change yourself'. Masculinity has never demanded this of men in the same way.

Further to this, the ideal fit body rejects, as radically as dieting, certain physiological aspects of being female: pads of fat. The ideal fit body is slim-hipped and muscular with no noticeable depositions of fat. There is nothing more embarrassing to it than a pair of idle, free-booting, certainly not muscular breasts. This is because, at the core of much fit-thinking is the model 'body-as-machine' ('Get Your Bodywork Up to Scratch', 'Does Your Body Need a Service?'). But, in so far as the body is nothing but a series of mechanical functions, hips, breasts and ample thighs are of dubious status.

Scientists are of course aware that rolling hips

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and swelling thighs are sources of stored energy, but no one knows why women — and fat men — curve and crease precisely *where* they do. This is an exhilarating thought. The very fat this culture so obsessively attempts to deny and eliminate is disposing itself over our bodies according to laws which no one understands. We are surrounded by a layer of substance which refuses to integrate itself into the mechanical model of the body.

But the mechanical model of the body, while it informs fit-thinking, does not enclose it. As writers on fitness make clear, much, much more is on offer. 'Fitness involves everything from emotional strength to perfect balance, from a wonderful figure to an inner peace' (Kounovsky, *The Joy of Feeling Fit*); 'The discipline experienced in self-mastery gives you a sense of freedom and autonomy' (Connolly and Einzig, *The Fitness Jungle*). Well, the discipline experienced in self-mastery *does* give you a sense of freedom and autonomy, but this frisson is apt to be undermined by the knowledge that, apart from our own physiques, we are not free at the moment to structure or control many aspects of our lives at all. It is at this point that the whole positive and maximising language of power and mastery that fit-writers deal in flips to reveal a vulnerable underbelly. 'Instead of feeling you are the victim of a vast and imponderable system run by experts, you suddenly realise *you* are the expert on your own body' (Connolly and Einzig); or, more succinctly, 'To face the world today you *have* to be fit' (Kounovsky). A note of desperation begins to hum.

This undercurrent of resignation and powerlessness beneath all the exhortations to 'take control' reveals the boundaries of fit optimism and also reveals some directly de-politicising effects of the fitness cult. For instance, *Woman and Home* last month printed an article entitled 'Help Yourself to Better Health' advising readers how best to boost their immune systems. One paragraph reads, 'Radiation and pollution are impossible to avoid in a modern world. We're exposed to them in the atmosphere and also in the home, for instance [for instance?] from television screens. Turn off the television-set if you're not watching it.' Reading such depressing instructions, we can only sigh and resolve even harder to look after *ourselves*.

And here we arrive at the central and most misleading tenet of the Health 'n' Fitness philosophy. It reads: 'Your Health is Under Your Control.'

There are two reasons why this is not true. On the one hand, the irreducible uncontrollability of the body ought to be very obvious: we live, we age, we die; nothing could be less within our control. But this is embarrassing, as you would predict, to our technocracy, because a technocracy abhors both decay and sadness. Technocratic thinking insists there is a solution to every problem and, for this reason, operates a complete taboo over the topic of death.

Illness as a vice

Illness is seen to be equally perplexing, so is spoken of only in terms of prevention and cure. But the darker side of the sunny 'Help Yourself to Better Health' view of life is that the status of ill-health is beginning to shift from an item of bad luck to a vice. Kounovsky says that 'a sensible exercise programme is in fact preventive medicine against breakdowns of the human machine', but what is missing from this statement is a qualifying clause about the unreliable nature of 'prevention' when the concept is removed from the 'mass' statistical world that is its home into the smaller world of the individual. Statistically, a raised metabolism *appears* to ensure you a longer life, but in July 1984 American jogging guru James Fixx dropped dead half way along his running circuit. Less extremely, there are numerous minor injuries incurred through fitness training. What these sad facts elegantly demonstrate is that exercise itself constitutes a risk to human health which is identical in *quality*, as a risk, to all the health-threatening factors that fit-training seeks to combat. In other words, while it is indisputable that exercise will *probably* help your health, your body is *never* under your control.

'The uncontrollability of the body ought to be obvious: we live, we age, we die; nothing could be less within our control. But this is embarrassing, as you would predict, to our technocracy; technocracy abhors both decay and sadness'

The other, less eternal, respect in which we are not in control of our health, no matter how fit we are, is that the world is becoming, thanks to the insensitive forward-march of technological/industrial progress, a less healthy place to live. This fact is obscured for us in Britain by a cluster of government health warnings telling us not to drink and drive, catch Aids, eat a high fat diet or smoke. The effect of these campaigns is to make it seem that, whenever there is any documented risk to the public health, the government will disseminate information. But this patently does not happen. At present all the data used and the results produced by current government committees on pesticides and additives in food are covered by The Official Secrets Act — and so, what's worse, is all information about leaks, accidents and everyday running procedures within British Nuclear Fuels Limited. The separation of public health data into these two 'private' and 'public' spheres leads me to wonder, for instance, about the Cancer Research advertising campaign. 'Help This Child to Breathe' the poster says, but has anyone even correlated that a) cancers are proliferating worldwide and b) levels of radioactivity are rising worldwide?

Why should the Health 'n' Fitness cult reach its peak now, under Thatcher? Is it because it represents the essence of self-cultivation and 'free' competition? For every statement expressing the essentially Tory joys of physical training ('After I had run the marathon, I knew then that anything I really wanted I could do') there is another eulogising the glow of camaraderie ('I've never seen any place in the world, any human activity, where love is more exemplified than on the pro football field'). Statements like the second one, if we had a socialist government, might be taken as indicating that the Health 'n' Fitness movement was reflecting a more general spirit of community and co-operation. Health 'n' Fitness has certainly taken on a particularly capitalist *style* under Thatcher — for instance, expensive equipment, locations and clothing are perceived to be more central to it than they otherwise might be — but the movement itself has been a steadily growing trans-atlantic and trans-electoral phenomenon for decades.

Fit to fight

By as early as 1956 President Eisenhower had been alerted to declining standards of youth fitness. Tests by the American Association of Health, Physical Fitness and Recreation had found low levels of fitness in children aged between ten and 17. In 1959 the Berlin crisis led to the draughting of an extra 196,000 men. Three out of every seven men called up were found to be unfit. A national conference was called, the result of which was the formation of The President's Council on Physical Fitness.

In 1960, Youth Fitness Week was celebrated under the slogan 'Fitness can Keep US Strong'. Eisenhower had defined fitness as 'the individual's maximum development for the nation's good'. He also said, 'Total fitness remains the greatest deterrant to any aggression.' Kennedy continued the health education campaign and America began to unlearn, even as they peaked (car ownership in the USA doubled between '48 and '58) the debilitating habits of too much leisure and too many labour-saving devices.

In 1968, Kenneth Cooper published a book called *Aerobics* which was widely influential (and happened to maintain the military link, Cooper's expertise deriving from many years' training experience in the US air-force) and, by 1969, British newspapers were full of headlines about the unfitness of recruits called up to the army, navy, air-force and some police forces. By this time a mass of statistics implicating unfitness in heart disease was circulating and all sorts of experts began recommending a more active life-style. Thus, the present day fitness cult has its origins in a military panic about recruiting requirements and it will be in all our interests when the military realise that atmosphere air-pollution — since it is 'common knowledge' that it is a 'serious threat to fitness' (that was written in 1971) — is already reducing the capacity of our armed forces to keep fit and healthy.

In the meantime there are surprising signs that, in the USA, where it started, the fit cult is dying down. According to surveys quoted in the journal *Food Marketing* earlier this year, Americans are getting bored with fitness and 30 per cent of American households now put convenience first and only 22 per cent put nutrition first when shopping for food. These percentages are the exact reverse of figures obtained three years ago.

This could be just wishful thinking on the part of the food industry but, if the trend consolidates and my insinuations are correct, Americans will soon find themselves being ambushed by a round of public health campaigns. Because, as the industrial world grows more and more sick-making, we, as inhabitants of it, will be enjoined more and more to neutralise these bad effects by getting *ourselves* into shape. The significance of the Health 'n' Fitness cult is not that it attempts to replace political action as a means of changing an individual's world, but that — in the short term — it succeeds in so doing. □

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Books

PRISONS

The writing and the walls

Boyd Tonkin

Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in 18th-Century England
JOHN BENDER *Chicago* £23.95

IF STONE WALLS do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage, what does? In a dazzling and densely-argued exercise in the archaeology of ideas, John Bender points the finger at fiction.

To put a deft and subtle theorem crudely, the 'penitentiary idea' that prompted the building of reformatories from the Enlightenment onwards had its origins in the narrative method of 18th-century realist novels. Writers such as Defoe and Fielding first handed down the stiff sentences that, in time, solidified in bricks and mortar.

For Bender, writing becomes again a world-shaping activity, not a sealed compartment in the train of European thought. In his conceptual firmament Mikhail Bakhtin shines more brightly than any of the later Parisian *maîtres*. Literature, and the reflection it stirs, emerges as a social process with corporate outcomes.

The whole book conducts a dialogue with the unseen shade of Michel Foucault, who surfaces in the preface and then sinks into the textual unconscious. It challenges the isolation of fictive narration as a self-enclosed and self-referring sphere of discourse. Without Foucault, the project would be unthinkable; but it grants an executive power to literature that the author of *Discipline and Punish* would never concede.

Novelists appear as the not so unacknowledged legislators of Georgian penology. As figurehead of their authority, the book proposes Henry Fielding, both magistrate and magisterial narrator: grandfather of English realism, modern detective practice and even the Metropolitan Police.

Bender isn't the first critic to have trodden this beat in recent years. Bernard Sharratt's *Reading Relations* runs an extremely funny excursion into Legal Fictions. But *Imagining the Penitentiary* traces the threads that bind *Moll Flanders* to the architecture of New Newgate with a doggedness that disarms charges of eccentricity. Steeped as it is in forensic metaphor, the ordinary language of literary judgment helps to prove the case.

Not that Bender sets up his stall as an unrepentant cause-and-effect merchant. He claims instead that 'the novel enabled the penitentiary by formulating, and thereby giving conscious access to, a real texture of attitudes, a structure of feeling, that I call the "penitentiary idea".'

'Enabled' means less than 'determined' and more than 'correlates or corresponds to', though this distinction drops from view more often than it should. Adorno once lamented that Walter Benjamin's attempts to connect, say, a poem and a department store led him to 'the crossroads of magic and positivism'. As he matches text to event, Bender sometimes ends up here, though it's always an exciting place to be.

At the outset of his story lie the old, unreformed prisons of London, commemorated and censured in Defoe. A kind of limbo, death-in-life and life-in-death, they excelled at what an NHS manager would call 'throughput'. Prisoners paid their debts and left; brought families to stay with them; awaited execution at Tyburn; even lived outside the gates but 'within the Rules' of the Fleet or the King's Bench. A potent mix of airport and underworld, this 'liminal' prison never sought to amend its flock, merely to contain them. The corrosive ironies of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* signals its legitimation crisis.

As the history of a sort of prisoner, *Robinson Crusoe* launches the narrative of solitude and introspection that fixes the bourgeois subject. It also feeds into the Enlightenment's theories of moral sentiment. They found human character both 'transparent' and bound by laws of conscience and affect. Hence the new penitentiary came to tell through its *architecture parlante* a tale that novelists had already adumbrated. Now a house of correction, it inserted the convict into a plot of punishment, remorse and reform that placed him forever in some great taskmaster's eye. The all-seeing warder of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon is a species of omniscient narrator.

Inmates of the reformatory found themselves ceaselessly inspected, their conscience laid bare by the machinery of retribution. Justice grew less spectacular and more deeply internalised. The work of rehabilitation finished when offenders thought and lived the sentence that the syntax of the penal code set out for them. Adam Smith overtly compared the rules of justice and of grammar: both were 'precise, accurate and indispensable'.

Bender contends that the realist novel anticipates in detail and design the practice of penology. Fictive texts conduct experiments on transparent selves parallel to, and in advance of, the cases recounted by prison reformers. In this perspective, the idea of the 'crime novel' becomes something of a tautology. Suspect characters have thronged the genre since its birth.

As others have, Bender shows how fictional and judicial discourse dovetailed. His special achievement is to push the affinity step by step from mere analogy to complex causality, until we see the penitentiaries arise from the moral blueprints that fiction, even more than philosophy, prepared. ▷

There's a clear note of scepticism in Humphrey Spender's introduction to 'LENSMAN' PHOTOGRAPHS 1932-52 (Chatto, £12.95) as he spans the years between his first flush of passion for the new-minted Leica and his final abandonment of the camera for painting and design. Uneasy about expenses scams and fabricated images on his stint at the *Daily Mirror*, embarrassed at the intrusive nature of his role as upper-class Mass Observer among the Depression poor and frustrated by the petty censorships of army work, or the kind of civic interference that sent him back to Newcastle for a second, rosier *Picture Post* feature on the city, Spender's no apologist for documentary 'truth'. And he's impatient with paeans that describe him as 'giving ordinary people their place in history' (a phrase that earnestly surfaces in the book's cover blurb). But he was a 35mm pioneer, who saw with the sensitive, restless eye of a painter, working hopefully in the awkward gaps between social commitment and social voyeurism. These are very fine pictures; it's easy to appreciate how they influence a more recent generation. Now we can take them on *his* terms. (Liz Heron)

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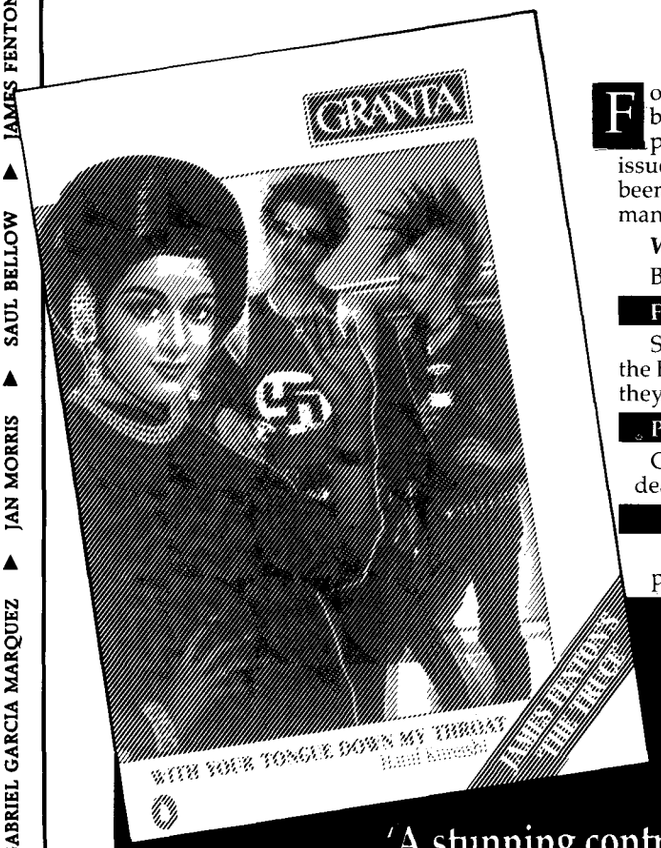

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FICTION

La tricoteuse

Leslie Dick

Casting Off
LOUISE DESALVO *Harvester* £10.95

THIS, LOUISE DESALVO's first novel, opens with a poem about knitting and, as anyone who has ever knitted knows, the principle of knitting, the mystery of knitting, is to take one length of wool and so knot it, gently and elaborately, that it becomes a sweater. Casting off is what you do at the end, tying up the last knots.

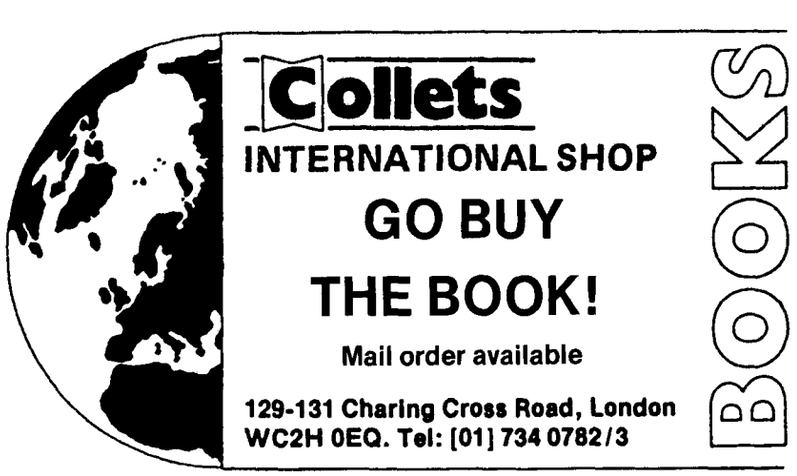
This novel's relentless internal voice, meandering on and on, moving from cooking to sex to children to mothers to laundry to the old people's home (where the mother died) to food to cooking to sex, is not unlike a piece of wool, thin and long and endless. And the book is like knitting, the lines of print going back and forth below each other until, in the end, you've got a novel that is not unlike a sweater. But I like books that are like hair shirts, or suits of armour, or seven-league boots, books that roll you up in fat and honey and felt (like Joseph Beuys), or that strip you bare, a little forked thing in cold wind. I don't need another sweater.

Casting Off is about sex, about two women in their late thirties who live in the suburbs of New York with boring husbands and some kids, even about part-time jobs — in Helen's case, writing the poetic slogans inside greeting cards. Big-hearted Maive (sic) is an enthusiastic adulteress, with three lovers permanently on the go, and she encourages Helen to venture out of her enormous kitchen (a passionate cook, Helen collects cook books, within which she hides her more erotic writings) into the thrilling world of illicit sex. After seeing *Saturday Night Fever* and experiencing 'the first genuine moment of wantonness and lust' of her adult life, Helen succumbs, and takes a lover herself. She undergoes crises of self-discovery as a result, which is surprising, since her Greenwich Village photographer lover seems cut out of a True Romance comic.

Sex is all about playing games: Helen plays saying-no-when-she-means-yes, a game I'd fondly imagined had gone out of fashion lately. The photographer is given lines like 'Get me a beer, woman', thus initiating the 'wonderful game' of defiance and submission, that happy tussle that always ends up in bed. Maive tells her lover Carlo that eating yoghurt ('sissy food') reminds her of him, to make him 'just a tiny bit angry. It would get his Italian up. And she liked it when his Italian was up'. Maive and Helen are best friends and tell each other all about everything: Maive likes telling funny stories about her Italian car mechanic, her Lower East Side artist, her Lufthansa airline pilot, almost as much as the sex itself. Helen is sure her lover has slept with every attractive woman in New York; this is his most irresistible feature. Maive's lovers 'all'(!) say: 'Maive honey, you've given me the hardest cock I've ever had in my life.' Thank god people don't talk like this in real life.

The book is scattered with passages in italics: erotic poemlets, little parables and fantasies, memoirs, dreams, etc. Interior monologues run wild, with one exemplary sentence continuing for three pages in a loose orgy of 'ands'. It comes as no surprise that, at the very end of the book, Helen (heartbroken) picks up her pen to reproduce word for word edited highlights from the opening section of *Casting Off*.

Virginia Woolf described Dorothy Richardson's experiments with stream of consciousness as writing the 'sentence of the feminine gender'. *Casting Off* presents what has become, since the 1970s, a familiar landscape of women's fiction — that strange terrain where Isadora Wing meets Molly Bloom (who somehow becomes a sort of honorary feminist). It's a sign of the gains of the last 20 years that this material is no longer shocking, but it's not enough to replicate the breakthroughs of the past. There is still a need for real experiment, both in writing and in the politics of sexual identity: a need for a new voyage out. □



PAPERBACKS

Guns and cash

Cynthia Rose

EVER SINCE the 1960s with its campus film-club revivals of *Casablanca*, the hard-boiled tradition of American letters has been gaining ground as a genre for academic lit crit. From the existential minimalism of Chandler and Hammett to the florid bluster of Mickey Spillane, one-time pulps are now elevated to the status of native prizes. In this rehabilitation of trash, Hubert Selby Jr's **Last Exit to Brooklyn** (Paladin, £3.95) has featured big.

And justifiably so. A souped-up torrent of street lingo from the pavements, diners and bedrooms of '50s New York, *Last Exit* has been both acclaimed and defamed. Its initial British appearance was marked by a protracted obscenity trial, which has caused some later defenders to overstate Selby's supposedly reformist impulses. But, above and beyond the painful accuracy with which it catalogues the street's twin obsessions with sex and anger, the book is mostly a tour de force of muscular, rhythmic prose. Beat fans in particular should relish its terse and staccato movement, its heptalk and jivespeak — not to mention its atmospheric inclusions of jazz.

Bopsters, hipsters and hypesters will also find the re-issue of William Burrough's **Queer** (Picador, £2.95) of interest — particularly the Dry One's fresh intro, which speaks of Mexico City during the time he created the book there. ('Basically, an Oriental culture that reflected two thousand years of disease and poverty and degradation and stupidity and slavery and brutality and psychic and physical terrorism.') *Queer* itself is an odd work — its tale of unrequited homosexual love rendered almost quaint by the period shorthand in which it is expressed. But in the later preface — which spices the methadone addict's sentimentality with a junkie's cold and caustic wit — Burroughs' tale is rounded out.

Passions and late publishing of another ilk in Christabel Pankhurst's **Unshackled** (Cresset, £6.95). This manuscript by the eldest Pankhurst daughter, muse of the militant Women's Social and Political Union suffragist alliance, was discovered after her death and first published in 1959. It offers a primary-source, blow-by-blow history of the events in the Pankhurst family's decade-long campaign for the women's vote. It eschews comment on the familial and sectarian rivalries which punctuated the struggle. But much more compelling is the portrait of Christabel herself which emerges: an authoress/activist with a vivid, sophisticated personality capable of galvanising her age — as well as a ruthless brand of self-certainty which could relegate democracy as a secondary concern.

John Ellis' **The Social History of The Machine Gun** (Century Hutchinson, £5.95) traces this accessory of gangsters, terrorists and hip-hop poseurs from its 18th-century birth as a gimmick

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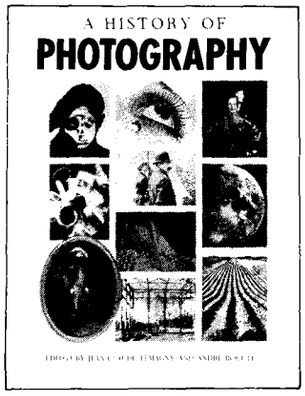

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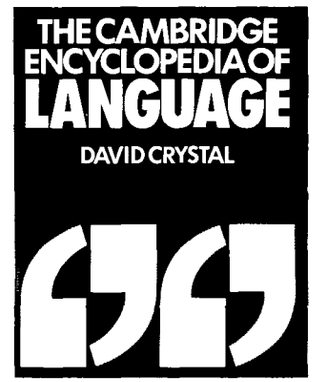

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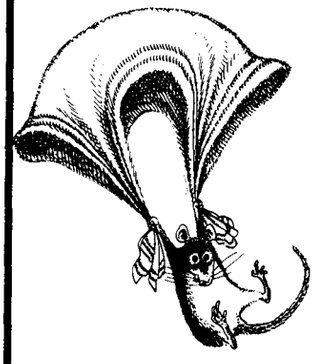

A House Inside Out

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through America's Civil War (which made the weapon, in terms of militaristic indispensability). With De Palma's turgid *The Untouchables* fresh on our screens, the saga of Al Capone's adoption of the 'tommy gun' offers timely titillation. Designed in 1918 as a 'trench broom' by one Colonel J. T. Thompson, it failed to sell as either an airborne scourge or a home defence prop for isolated ranchers. Not until September 1925, when Chicago gangsters 'Polack' Joe Saltis and Frank MacFarlane blew away the rival family O'Donnell, did the languishing firearm contrive to enter history. Subsequently it made us familiar with many of the most flamboyant figures in this book: Ma Barker, Baby Face Nelson, John Dillinger, 'Pretty Boy' Floyd, Bonnie Parker, Clyde Barrow and — of course — Machine Gun Kelly himself.

When J.K. Klavans' **God, He Was Good** (Pavanne, £2.95) debuted in 1984, critics of the American novel were trying to link several disparate voices in a new school of Redneck Naturalism. Bobbie Anne Mason, Ellen Gilchrist and Jayne Anne Phillips were meant to be its stars — spinning fresh tales of ordinary folk adrift in a universe of fast food, MTV, shopping malls and the old-fashioned sexual warfare of the so-called 'New South'.

The concept, of course, was always primarily a reviewer's conceit. But its most popular exemplar, Bobbie Anne Mason, deserved her comparisons to Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor: like Chuck Berry or John Sayles, she does create poetic, lyrical pieces from the most prosaic constituents of day-to-day life. But in most of that flood of novels which followed her book *Shiloh*, the tone is set by a middle-class perception of 'blue-collar' pursuits. Set among unmarried mothers working in a West Virginia beauty parlour, *God, He Was Good* is yet another of these and adds nothing to literature's grasp of heartland America.

Its author affects a brash and knowing colloquial style. But her plot — workmates Claudine and Dolores are drawn into unexpected sisterhood in the face of romantic disappointments — owes more to the blunt schemata of C & W songs. Taken on that level, as a broad and slightly surrealistic sitcom, it could appeal to fans of Dolly Parton.

Equally light in weight is actress Carrie Fisher's mega-hyped **Postcards From The Edge** (Picador, £3.50): the arch, autobiographically-informed tale of coke-addled actress 'Suzanne Vale'. Fisher's celebrity and personal misadventures with chemistry bear less relevance to her fable of the Me First Generation than does the literary output of some style-conscious predecessors — Bret Easton Ellis; Tama Janowitz; even the Joan Didion of *Play It As It Lays*. To keep its particular brand of slick, showbizzy shallowness in perspective, *Postcards* should be read in tandem with Bob Woodward's excellent *Wired: The Short Life and Fast Times of John Belushi* (in which the real Ms Fisher plays a supporting role).

Wired — which, contrary to the press it received, refuses to editorialise about either Belushi's behaviour or drugs — fleshes out the scenery behind books like those by Ellis, Janowitz and Fisher. The culture it delineates is that which gives today's personality stars their model of how hip celebrity is meant to enact itself.

And that culture is American culture, Hollywood-style, with its mythic contradictions: the 'communal' experience opposed to the reification of stars; the fanatical self-interest required to promote the artistry of a sensitive 'inner' self; the ironies of posing as an outcast and a rebel once fame has conferred her conventional material rewards.

America's fetish for fame (like the pathology of her romance with 'success') provides a disturbing undercurrent in *Postcards From The Edge*. But, basically, the book is coach-trip fare: a funny tale of trauma LA-size, with facials for therapy and valet-parking for spice. □

Cynthia Rose is the editor of City Limits

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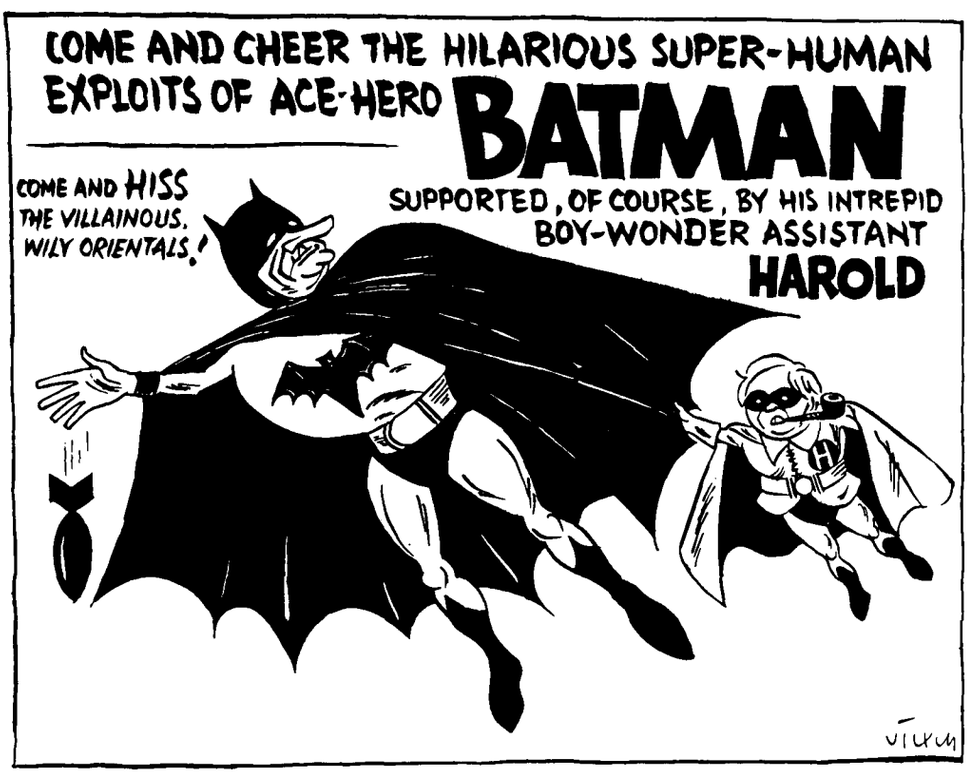
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VICKY

Who killed Vicky? Literally, of course, the 'best-loved and most fiercely hated cartoonist of his time' took his own life in 1966 with an overdose of barbiturates. But, in their excellent, illustrated tribute, VICKY (Secker, £9.95), Russell Davies and Liz Ottaway lay the symbolic blame for his death at the feet of the then PM, Harold Wilson (seen here clutching at LBJ's Vietnam-bombing wings). Vicky was never able to capture Wilson's face to his own satisfaction and, more importantly, saw in his person the failure of the post-war Labour party — a failure which drove him to despair in a quite real sense. Passionately political, the Hungarian-Jewish emigré (born Viktor Weisz in 1913) had devoted his life to shaking the British from their apathy. In the pages of the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Evening Standard*, the *New Statesman*, he skewered world leaders and cried out loud (often to his editors' embarrassment) for those whom they trod underfoot. Undoubtedly Vicky was obsessive — drawing and re-drawing maniacally — and less than easy to be married to, but his vision and commitment would not come amiss today. (Harriett Gilbert)

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SCIENCE

The poker problem

Steven Rose

Thinking Machines: The Search for Artificial Intelligence
IGOR ALEKSANDER and PIERS BURNETT *Oxford* £15
The Society of Mind
MARVIN MINSKY *Heinemann* £15.95

MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE biology developed later as a science than physics, but biologists seem always to have tried to explain the properties of living things in terms of models derived from physical machines. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of minds and brains, always analogised to the most complex available human artefact. Back in the 17th century, Descartes explained the brain as an elaborate hydraulic system. Later, it was seen successively as an electrical machine, a telegraphic device and a telephone exchange.

Since the end of the 1939-45 war, it has been seen as a computer. The brain, we were told with increasing emphasis through the 1960s, was 'nothing but' a particularly elaborate computing machine. What is more, as actual computers grew bigger and more powerful, their enthusiasts spoke with increasing arrogance of 'artificial intelligence' (AI). It would not be long before computers many times more powerful and intelligent than mere humans would be built — probably by the end of the '60s, certainly by the '70s (or, as the decades wore on, the '80s, '90s and then the bimillenium).

Research into AI in Britain was almost stopped in its tracks in the aftermath of a sceptical government report by the engineer James Lighthill in the early '70s, to be resurrected a decade later in response to the perceived Japanese and American threat in the form of the so-called Alvey programme. Now, funded by the military, it is in full swing once more. 'Intelligent systems' lie at the heart of Star Wars and of factory robotisation. But can they tell us how brains might work?

Philosophers are divided — witness a recent set of Reith lectures by John Searle. But what have brain scientists to say? Until recently I was a sceptic, agreeing with many that, as a metaphor for real minds and brains, the computer was at best a sort of poetic analogy, with no real explanatory power. That's still true, I believe, for the serial digital computers which were the stock-in-trade of the old AI school, but a newer generation of AI enthusiasts, with perhaps a little more respect for the complexities of real life than the '60s generation, has developed a fresh approach, so-called Parallel Distributed Processing (PDP), based not on serial, one-after-another operations, but on networks of multiply-interacting components. Such networks show emergent system properties, such as learning and memory, which might begin to be regarded as simulations of some of the simpler properties of real brains.

But, as these two books show — one for positive and one for negative reasons — there is still a long way to go. On the face of it, they are rather similar: each is a square-bound, glossily-produced text by principal authors who have been major figures in the short history of AI since its birth; one (Aleksander) at London's Imperial College, the other (Minsky) at the institution Imperial often wishes it were, the mammoth MIT. But it is the differences that are far more revealing. Aleksander and his co-author, Piers Burnett, have written a thoughtful and refreshingly modest account of the achievements of AI. Beautifully illustrated by colour computer-graphics throughout, their text begins by attempting to define intelligence and goes on to show how, from Babbage in the 19th century through Turing and the AI lobbyists in this, machine builders have attempted to simulate it. Computers can perform logical mathematical operations millions of times faster than humans; they can be programmed to play open, logic-based games like chess to grandmaster standard. But fit them with robot outputs and set them problems that humans can solve with trivial ease — like tossing an apple core into a waste-basket five feet away — and they flounder.

Aleksander and Burnett carefully explain why this is, though they miss my own favourite difference between human and computer intelligence, which is to consider the reasons why computers may be able to play chess to grandmaster level, but cannot play effective poker. You can programme them with the probabilities of drawing a flush versus three of a kind, but bluffing is an exercise in competitive psychology only possible because humans, unlike computers, are open and indeterminate systems. Nonetheless, if I were looking for a book for a computer-crazed young person, I'd have no hesitation in opting for **Thinking Machines.**

By contrast, I'd find it hard to recommend **The Society of Mind** to anyone. Back in the '60s, Marvin Minsky began to model mind processes on the basis of devices called Perceptrons. He typifies those who believe that it isn't necessary to worry about how real brains are built, what they look like under the microscope or to the physiologist. It is enough to think about the cognitive processes that typify 'mind-like' activity. Thus, if one can build black-box models that apparently reproduce these cognitive processes, one will have created artificial intelligence whether or not that intelligence operates by mechanisms in any way related to those used by human brains. This 'top-down' Aristotelian approach is guaranteed to infuriate most biologists, who were not unduly distressed at the failure of the Perceptron theory. The present book consists of a series of short, aphoristic chapters, each prefaced by a quotation from the great or the good, from the Buddha to Shakespeare, dividing 'mind' into a series of hierarchically organised agents, called 'Anger', 'Sleep', 'More' or, it seems, anything-else-you-fancy, whose activities are described in baby-language liberally punctuated with exclamation marks. As a contribution to either serious thought about minds and brains, or scientific popularisation, it is a sad failure.

If the new modellers are to avoid Minsky's sterilities, they will need to work in closer conjunction with researchers working on real brains and real behaviour. Study of such actual brains has helped drive the PDP approach and perhaps the favour may be about to be returned. But there is further to go than this, and the problem is demonstrated even in Aleksander and Burnett's careful text. Consider their description of intelligence, as a *property*, more or less fixed, of humans (and perhaps of machines). Yet an effective theory of intelligence must see it not as an individual property but as a *process*, manifested in dialectical interaction between individuals and their natural and social environments, developmentally and historically contingent, and with a future which is radically unpredictable. By contrast, computers are boringly determinate. □

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Books of the year

So much for the Death of the Novel: fifty per cent of the books that NS *contributors have enjoyed this year are fiction (and nine per cent of the non-fiction is* Spycatcher, *which doesn't say much for the state of contemporary theory). Onward the imagination*

Josephine Saxton

The heroine of **Light Years** by Maggie Gee (Faber, £3.95) is loaded, solipsistic, arrogant and spoiled. She hastens the death of a small rare animal, she spends five hundred pounds on cut flowers. Those who think the rich should be eaten could read this book and adore this monster, her son, her husband, her servant, and care what becomes of them all. Now *that* is first-rate fiction. Also, very hilarious at times.

Geoff Dyer

For a reader there is nothing better than seeing a writer you like getting better and better — especially when the standards set by earlier works are as high as those of Michael Ondaatje. Many reviewers were unduly concerned by whether **In**

the Skin of a Lion (Secker, £10.95) was really a novel rather than a jagged mosaic of intensely poetic images. For my money it was far and away the most intensely *imagined* book of the year. By the same criterion V. S. Naipaul's **The Enigma of Arrival** (Viking, £10.95) declares itself from the first sentence to be some kind of masterpiece — though what kind of masterpiece I'm not sure.

Fay Weldon

I recommend **Heartbreak Hotel** by Gabrielle Burton (King Penguin, £3.95) where science fiction meets feminism with, for once, verve and inventiveness.

Angus Calder

The wisdom of 90 years informs Naomi Mitchison's fictionalised reconstruction of the youth of humankind, **Early in Orcadia** (Richard Drew, £9.85), while Martin Bernal's erudite **Black Athena** (Free Association, £15) devastates racialist distortions; classical Greeks were right to believe that their own culture largely came from Africa. Chinua Achebe's long awaited fifth novel, **Anthills of the Savannah** (Heinemann, £10.95), is a deeply moving requiem for his own generation of Nigerians.

Christopher Priest

Playing for Time by Jeremy Lewis (Collins, £12.95) is a book I can recommend unhesitatingly. It's unusual, funny and charming: the autobiography of a *nice* man, written with modesty and irrepressible mischief, and brimming with the love of a good yarn. It's also crying out for a second volume (I've been searching every bookshop, so far without success). I hope Mr Lewis has a long life, and writes about it all.

Malcolm Imrie

There are warmer deserts than this one and I've been escaping to fictions of North Africa, or North Africans. Juan Goytisolo's **Landscapes After the Battle** (Serpent's Tail, £7.95) hands over a prostrate Paris to its *beurs*, *flâneurs* and perverts. About time too, though his tour of the ruins is a bit cursory. Michel Tournier's **The Golden Droplet** (Collins, £10.95) is more substantial, his best for a long while. It follows a Berber boy from his oasis to the mirage of freedom in that same racist republic — an unforgettable sentimental journey only slightly weighed down in the end with an overload of Tournier's eternal truths. Most of all, I loved Ann Schlee's **Laing** (Macmillan, £10.95), which takes the opposite route, retracing one extraordinary white explorer's road to Timbuctoo. She writes like a dream, displacing imperialism, condensing its racial and sexual fantasies, burying its passions in the sand. I've heard there are some good Arab writers, too.

Richard Deveson

I took heart from the essays collected in **Václav Havel, or Living in Truth** (Faber, £15). Havel doesn't write to be puffed by publicists or to star on chat shows, but to test out, with his liberty, the principle that truth will prevail against power. Let us hope that he will eventually be proved right — in the West as well as behind the Iron Curtain.

Diana Eden

This year, for pathos, bathos, poignancy and farce, nothing has come near my own *NS* payslips . . . Apart from those tear-jerking documents, the book of *any* year is **The Short Stories of William Trevor** (Penguin, £6.95). As a compassionate chronicler of all our foibles and fables, Trevor stands alone. Ex-public schoolboys should be compelled to read his chilling tale called 'Torridge'.

Chris Mullin MP

Without doubt, Peter Wright's **Spycatcher** (available under all the best counters). Not a great work of literature — and, in places, very tedious — *but* for the first time provides chapter and verse for what many of us have long suspected: namely, that our security services, far from being impartial servants of the state, are in fact a para-military wing of the Tory party. I also enjoyed the first volume of Tony Benn's **Diaries** (Hutchinson, £14.95).

Shena Mackay

Elegant, witty and outrageously funny are adjectives often applied to Brigid Brophy's novels and **The Finishing Touch**, first published in 1963, deserves them all. Reissued, aptly, by GMP (£3.50), it comes with a new introduction in which its author reveals that the heroine, headmistress of a louche finishing school on the French Riviera, is in fact an affectionate portrait of the art historian and spy, Anthony Blunt.

Tariq Ali

Life and Fate by Vasily Grossman (Flamingo, £5.95) is one of the most powerful novels of this century. It is certainly the best I have ever read. Grossman's exquisitely crafted work deals with the lives of those affected simultaneously by Stalinism and fascism. The besieged city becomes a metaphor; the author sees in it a symbol of the state of modern civilisation. Brezhnev's ideological hatchet man, Suslov, told Grossman that his book would not be published in the Soviet Union for 300 years . . . It is currently being serialised by an official literary magazine in Gorbachev's Moscow. Suslov and Grossman are both dead.

Maureen Duffy

I must declare an interest: the best book I have almost read this year, Arthur Miller's autobiography **Time Bends**, is published by my own publisher (Methuen, £17.95). It's a price justified by 600 pages of integrity and wit, woven into a seamless garment that echoes the structure of *Death of a Salesman*. Another good Christmas present for radicals is Robert Hughes' **The Fatal Shore** (Collins Harvill, £15) as necessary for British as Australian history.

Nick Kimberley

What a Life! (Collins, £5.95), a novel by EVL (EV Lucas) and GM (George Morrow), was Dada *avant la lettre*. In 1911 they took a pair of scissors to a Whiteley's catalogue and pasted together a pictorial autobiography, its errant narrative held in place by schoolboy humour. And, with Whiteley's but a fading memory, what better memorial to department store delirium?

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Harriett Gilbert

Robert Coover has always given the impression of lusting after cinema: he drives his prose to create sounds and pictures with an almost unparalleled intensity, while twisting it as free from linearity as

words strung on words can get. With **A Night at the Movies** (Heinemann, £12.95) he declares his passion. A programme of manic trailers, shorts and features, it's a virtuoso orchestration of form, style, content and obsession.

Alison Hennegan

Peter Parker's **The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos** (Constable, £15) examines the overwhelming influence which public school ideals exerted over *all* schools and classes. Parker handles his remarkably diverse material — educational theory, school magazines, boys' papers, obituary, memoir, school and regimental histories, troops' papers, poetry and fiction — with confidence, wit and gusto. The schools' values were often loathsome, their products often fine. From his examination of that central paradox, Peter Parker has produced an invigorating and beautifully written book.

Oliver Harris

'Two friends came to visit Djuha as he was frying himself some quails. "This dish lacks salt," said one friend after he had picked a bird out of the pan and tasted it. "It also lacks vinegar," said the second friend, biting into another quail. Taking the last quail, Djuha said, "What matter, since now it lacks quails!"' As a change from turkey, dip into **Arab Folktales** translated by Inea Bushnaq (Penguin, £6.95) for this and many more spicey entrées into the arabesque world.

Julia Neuberger

Of all the brilliant books I read in 1987 — and it was a good year — the most impressive was David Shipler's **Arab and Jew** (Bloomsbury, £17.95). It has honesty, grief, pain, rigour and moving quotations from both sides. Shipler was the *New York Times* man in Jerusalem — non-Jewish, feeling drawn to neither side — when he put this together. It is not to be missed.

David Edgar

Quite the last person on the block to take delivery of **Spycatcher**, I found the whole thing surprisingly racy and engaging. But, for me, all else was overshadowed by Primo Levi's devastating memoir of his time in Auschwitz, **If This Is a Man**, and his odysseyan journey home, **The Truce**, now paired in paperback by Abacus. His **The Periodic Table** had both wit and grit; but it was nothing to these two. Their author's suicide was one of the saddest events of the year.

Glyn Hughes

D. H. Lawrence: Life into Art by Keith Sagar (Penguin/Viking, £14.95 & £6.95) is not only interesting to Lawrence scholars; it expertly and thoroughly traces how a novel, play or poem is affected by the experiences received by an author while writing it, how they are laid down like hidden rock strata through the various drafts — a part of the structure that is rarely discussed. It is also a profound analysis of Lawrence's work, one that is (for once) free of egotistical autobiographical 'encounters'.

Steven Rose

I choose the second of A. S. Byatt's series on coming of age in Yorkshire and Cambridge in the 1950s, **Still Life** (Penguin, £4.50), for its immaculate observation of place, period, class and gender, from the precision of cappucino drunk from sloping-side glass cups to the complexity of 20-year-olds aspiring to adult sexuality. And the memory of an accidental young death, surrounded by burgeoning life in a cluttered kitchen, will not soon fade.

Grace Ingoldby

Sleepers awake to two 'quiet', excellently written and unforgettable novels written this year — and not celebrated by trumpets, telegrams, huge cash prizes or page-long reviews as they might have been had not the literary climate insisted, as usual, on hyping the indifferent: **The Dresden Gate** by Michael Schmidt (Hutchinson, £9.95) and **In the Skin of a Lion** by Michael Ondaatje (Secker, £10.95).

Adrianne Blue

For bravery, I choose Ian Walker's Berlin odyssey, **Zoo Station** (Secker, £12.95). It bestrides genres as well as the Wall. For passion, Michèle Roberts' sensuous novel of rebirth in Venice, **Mrs Noah** (Methuen, £10.95). For hope, Jeremy Baker's **Tolstoy's Bicycle** (Panther, £4.95), a compendium of who did what when. Tolstoy learned to ride a bicycle at 67.

John Lloyd

Ian Jack's **Before the Oil Ran Out** (Secker, £9.95) overcomes a reluctance to recommend a book by a friend. In part that is because it contains a number of pieces — largely written for the *Sunday Times* magazine when Jack was a staff writer there — of which I said to myself on reading: I wish I had written that. One piece in particular excited admiration and envy. His essay 'Finished with engines' is a memoir of his father — a skilled engineer — and of his boyhood on the Fife coast. Brought up a few miles further up the same coast in the home of my grandfather, also a skilled engineer, I naturally identify strongly. But, much more than that, I was moved emotionally and professionally by the extraordinary talent Jack can muster to describe a man and a period in his life open to the worst kind of writer-traps of mawkishness, cynicism and boastfulness. He avoids them all, to craft a miniature masterpiece.

Next week: Part II, *including the new editor's book of 1987.*

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CHILDREN: 0-5

Christmas message . . .

Hilary Wilce

WHAT IS THE ROLE of propaganda in children's books? What, for instance, should one make of **Piggybook** (Magnet, £1.95), the tale of poor, put-upon Mrs Piggott, reduced to a life of drudgery by the odious Mr P and the two odious Master Ps, who one day walks out leaving only a note: 'You are pigs'?

Without her, the household degenerates into squalor and the occupants literally turn into pigs, rooting for scraps, at which point Mrs P is joyfully welcomed home and a new regime is mounted under which Mr and Master Ps do the housework while lucky Mrs P gets to mend the car. Anthony Browne's is surely an admirable moral tale, to be applauded by anti-sexists everywhere. And yet the book prompts unease.

For one thing, the story begs numerous questions. Why did Mrs P let her sons grow up like that in the first place? And what was she thinking of, allowing her husband to carry on in that way? Didn't she have a voice to scream with? Hands to throw things at his fat head? More importantly, the story is clearly intended for a very young audience, yet this is the age that takes things literally. To them this is not a joking commentary on man's pig-headedness to woman, but a half-scarey story about what might happen to a family if Mum goes missing. Painstaking explanations can get to the heart of the matter, but the fact they are necessary shows just how ill-conceived the project was in the first place.

Which is not to say that propaganda has no place in children's literature. All children's books carry coded information about the world, and what is deemed to be good or bad in it, and explicit social messages do have their (occasional) uses. But such material is highly volatile, turning to lead or acid under the slightest pressure, and can be dangerous. Used badly, as it so often is, it can only muddle or undermine the very causes being espoused. Writers, illustrators and publishers need to know exactly what they are doing, and why, before entering this minefield.

Eliptical messages are safer and probably as effective. In David McKee's gently humorous **Snow Woman** (Andersen Press, £5.95), Rupert and Kate live in a liberated household where Dad does the hoovering while Mum keeps busy hanging her feminist paintings on the walls. When the children rush off to build a snow man both parents tediously and automatically correct them: 'You mean snowperson'. The main story doesn't amount to much, but the sub-text is quirky and challenging.

And, talking of propaganda, children are fed an awful lot of garbage at Christmas; not just festive chocolate selections, either. Experienced story-readers fight shy of buying Christmas books, knowing there is nothing worse than having to read a pop-up version of Jingle Bells in June, but there must be a market because publishers seem determined to ensure a seasonal spate of stories about snow, Christmas trees and presents. A couple of effective little stories shine through this year's crop, delightful in spite of their seasonal connotations rather than because of them.

Santa's Hat by Claire Schumacher (Dent, £5.95) is a happily illustrated book about jungle animals finding Santa's lost headgear, while A. Vesey's **Thomas and the Christmas Presents** (Magnet, £1.95) communicates all a child's guilty horror at having opened presents ahead of time.

Ivan Gantschev's **The Christmas Train** (Viking Kestrel, £6.50) — a real story about the writer's Aunt who, as a child, saved a train from an avalanche by setting the family's Christmas tree ablaze — is hauntingly illustrated but 'just like the railway children', as one junior critic put it. **The Little Tree** (Gollancz, £4.95), an illustrated version of an e.e. cummings poem, gives better literary value.

Of course books do have a central role to play at Christmas. They make far better presents than the latest Blastobot or My Little Donkey and no child can ever have too many. The only problem is choice, given the stunning quality and variety available. Some others worth considering are Blake Morrison's delightful **The Yellow House** (Walker Books, £6.95), about a magical deserted house and garden, with illustrations by Helen Craig; Bob Graham's **The Red Woollen Blanket** (Walker Books, £5.95), concerning the life and times of Julia's ever-more frayed comfort object; **Smudge** (Deutsch, £5.50) by Mike Dickinson, which follows the adventures of a little smudge of a boy who jumps out of the corner of a painting and explores his art gallery world; and Michael Foreman's vividly evocative **Ben's Baby** (Andersen Press, £5.95) about a new arrival in the artist's family.

For older children in this age range **Gunga Din** (Dent, £6.95), Robert Andrew Parker's illustrations of the Kipling poem, and Helen Zane Jensen's **Uncle Ivan's Magic Box** (Hamish Hamilton, £6.95), a fantastical tale introducing the concept of gravity, would make beautiful, and suitably educational, presents. Colin McNaughton's **There's An Awful Lot of Weirdos in Our Neighbourhood** (Walker Books, £9.95) — 'a book of rather silly verse and pictures' — would probably get a warmer welcome. Educational it isn't, but as propaganda for simple silliness its message is writ large on every page: 'My cousin Davey/Eats anything with gravy:/Chocolate cake, ice cream or peas!/But I prefer tripe/When it's lukewarm and ripe/And it slobbers all over your knees!' □

CHILDREN: 6-11

. . . is the medium

Marsha Rowe

J. M. BARRIE'S **Peter Pan** shows how much the success of a story is all in the telling. This original version (republished by Viking Kestrel, £7.95) has all the wit and drama to appeal to lively, modern 6-11-year-olds who are bored by the Walt Disney cartoon version and who, I'm sure, will not swallow the dreadfully Victorian attitudes for a minute — not Wendy's sad devotion to the mending, nor Tink's addiction to 'the glories of being abandoned' — nor swallow the Darling parents, he so incompetent about caring as to appear callous and she so virtuous yet distracted, nightly undertaking the 'tidying up of her children's minds'.

No wonder Neverland is so enticing — a place where the family's rivalries, envies, fears, vanities and spite can all be played out in full character dress. This edition is also brought up to date by the new pictures by Jan Ormerod, in which Peter Pan has a fey and slightly alarming glee and Wendy, underground, achieves a perky glamour which offsets her attachment to that sewing needle.

Dream House by Jan Mark (Viking Kestrel, £6.95) has two village girls, sworn enemies, who cannot resist the attractions of the manor house where creative-writing courses enlist the famous as teachers — notably a TV actor whose runaway, insecure and spoiled daughter joins him for a weekend, thus enlivening dull village life for the

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competitive girls and, eventually, reconciling them. This book, slow to start, written from the vantage points of the three different girls in the first chapter, builds up to a satisfyingly realistic story of youthful rage, revenge and understanding — encompassing along the way a wry younger brother and an impossible, older teenage sister, who's incomprehensibly besotted by boys and strange clothes (such as mittens which, when hung on the line together, give an image of 'a person lopped off and full of holes').

One of the most engaging new books is **A Rat's Tale** (Gollancz, £8.95) by Tor Seidler — although the Fred Marcellino black-and-white illustrations are so appealing and fine that it would also make a good read-aloud story. The style is New York streetwise, neat and pacey, graphic without fuss; 'little coins of sunlight were scattered amongst the real coins on the ground.' The heroine has the class, character and beauty of a Katherine Hepburn, but only a wee bit part. It's mainly the sewer rat's story, and about how he nobly saves the rich wharf rats from eviction and then, even more nobly, rejects the subsequent fame and glory — the moral has it both ways.

But what of the child not so keen on reading? Try Michael Johnson's **Fantastic Paper Gliders** (Penguin, £6.95) with exotic shapes, from thunderbirds to dragonflyers, ready to be pressed out and glued together (and in need of a patient adult to help).

Or perhaps, for a child bored by letters but who will thrill to the hunt for all the things beginning with 'b' concealed in the pale blue wings of a butterfly, you could try **Animalia** (Macmillan, £7.50), a gorgeous, enormous alphabet of amusing, cunning pictures, by Graeme Base.

Then, for real horror, you could do no better than **Here Lies Price** (Faber, £5.95), a truly bewitching, terrifying collection of stories by Susan Price. Here there is no country of reason; the only moral is of the heart. And even that may be suspect and lead to a strange grave; as it did for the third sister who is lost to the trolls in the mountains; or the bridegroom who drinks with the dead friend and loses a century in time. Each story invitingly plays with its own fiction — from the first, 'Here's a true story about liars', to 'A teacher told me this story, so I don't know if it's true or not.' Included is the story of Jesus as a vicious youngster abusing his power, based on an old ballad 'The Bitter Withy'.

To keep up with the fashion for Halloween reclaiming the streets every 31 October, with excited adherents to trick-or-treating dashing about breaking eggs and spilling talcum powder on front door steps, Faber has also published an anthology of poems edited by Robert Fisher, **Witch Words** (£5.95).

Two collections to be recommended are **Family Gathering** (Dent, £8.50) chosen by Pat Thomson, whose drawings are rather scrappy but some of whose stories are hilarious (often dealing with an individual's sense of space/place/peace within the large or small family group) and **The Puffin Treasury of Favourite Stories** thoughtfully selected by Clifton Fadiman (Viking Kestrel, £14.95), whose lucid, simply written and direct introductions add a personal touch to the book's interest and help a young reader understand why and how a story came to be. 'The more I knew about the human race,' explains Fadiman, 'the larger I felt *myself* to be.' It's also full of zany touches, like this by Ogden Nash: 'Children aren't happy with nothing to ignore/And that's what parents were created for.' □

FICTION

Subway walls

Scott Bradfield

The Year of Silence and **Zero db**
MADISON SMARTT BELL *Chatto* £11.95 each

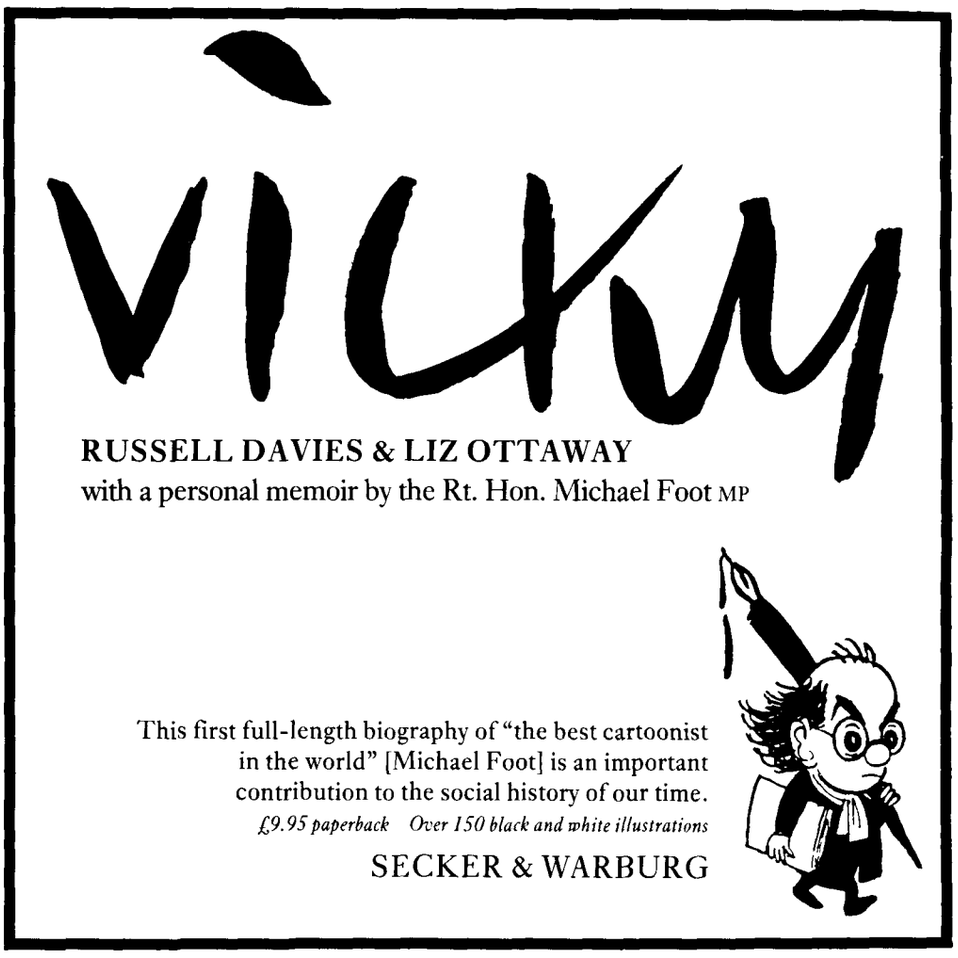
IT SEEMS AS IF many of today's young writers are hurrying to have their entire *corpus* assembled by sometime early next week. Madison Smartt Bell's previous novel, *Straight Cut,* was a funny, eccentric and excusably aimless thriller which succeeded by virtue of the intelligent, modular, dissafected voice of its narrator. With his simultaneously published fourth and fifth books of fiction, however, Bell's somewhat practised aimlessness begins to seem too mechanical and deliberate a method for writing too many books.

The novel depicts that 'year of silence' dividing the death of an enigmatic young woman from a day when her rememberers begin to confront the vacancy of their remembering. Whether her death results from suicide or accident is never really clear, for Bell doesn't allow us to hear her inner voice at the moment she overdoses so much as to see the thin walls and feel the thinner textures of the rooms she lives in.

The novel doesn't progress so much as expand; its central scene, describing Marian's death, is encapsulated by disjointed scenes which, instead of illuminating Marian's life, juxtapose it with the lapses and unnameable emotions of other, equally voiceless lives. The lovers, acquaintances, even random passers-by never actually encounter Marian herself, but rather orbit the long lapse of her passing. Bell's slightly diffuse people make irreverent, token gestures designed to enunciate their own private and immaculate existence. They practise on stringless plyboard pianos, win pointless karate matches, snort coke and disband relationships, never actually engaging with the terms of their disaffection.

People never speak in this novel; they just allow the year's silences to accumulate, like dust or unwrapped newspapers. In the novel's final scene, Sinclair tells Gwen, on the night they break up, 'I was a little bit in love with you, I think, back there for a while.' And Gwen responds, rather predictably by now, 'Oh, dammit, Jimmy, I'm sorry . . . I mean probably I was too.'

Because **The Year of Silence** depicts contemporary New York as nothing more than a blurry map of inarticulate relationships, it's easy to become inured to its world. The reader does not recognise the presence of people, events and language; only their absence. Everyone sounds the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same here. Men, women, addicts, dwarves, lovers, artists, relatives, friends: these never examine the novel's central event — the decision which Marian herself may or may not have made — but examine rather their own blank incomprehension.

If the reader faces a truly existential choice here it is not simply to live, as Camus avows, but to bother reading any more pages in this weary novel. Where successful 'minimalists' like Raymond Carver use fiction to transform the mundane into the real, *The Year of Silence* takes the real and makes it impossibly mundane. It contains neither characters, events nor voices, only the thin and oppressive atmosphere of Bell's own very obvious 'method'.

It would be easy, having read only *The Year of Silence,* to consider Bell merely a bad writer and have done with him. The simultaneous publication of his first story collection, **Zero db,** may not validate his talent, but it does encourage us at least to suspect its existence.

Many of the stories suffer from the same deliberate lapses and characterlessness as *Silence,* but at times here Bell does fulfil some of the promise of his previous books. His best stories, such as 'The Lie Detector' and 'The Forgotten Bridge', don't merely confront us with mechanical silences but depict those real conditions of life which make silences significant and even 'meaningful' to us. Negotiating with disreputable landlords, seeking quick work and love without commitment, intellectually flirting with the inner city's hoodlums; all these are vents which come much more alive in Bell's fiction than silence itself. If nothing else, they make the silences more resonant and profound, embracing them like the deep wood of a cello or a violin.

Like many good writers, from Fante to Miller, Bell's only literary voice may not be his own, but it can sound sure and firm — the disenchanted and unregenerate voice of a young man grown tired of trying to make any sense of the world. Unlike *The Year of Silence,* there are stories in *Zero db* which will make the presence of Bell's voice seem far more memorable than its absence. □

JOURNALISM

How does it feel?

Jon Savage

What A Long Strange Trip It's Been
ed. JANN WENNER *Ebury Press* £12.95

LYRICS FROM BOB DYLAN and the Grateful Dead contextualise '20 years of *Rolling Stone*': 'the story of *our* times'. Thirty-three pieces of reportage and journalism — by Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson and Greil Marcus among others; mostly pretty good — interspersed with pix, again mostly pretty good, particularly Richard Avedon's '76 shots which show up 'American Leaders' like Nelson Rockefeller and Rose Kennedy for the living dead that they were. Thirty-three pieces arranged in chronological order, selected from well over 500 issues: not much of an average, really, but I'm sure there's *lots* of good stuff left out.

Sanitised though they might be, these collected pieces do tell a story. The facts of *Rolling Stone* are a commonplace: hippie mag starts off as mimeographed sheet, consolidates the idea of intelligent pop writing and 'new' journalism and, through the entrepreneurial expertise of Jann Wenner, goes through changes in perfect sync with the times. By the mid-'70s, the Dope Page is supplanted by Ski Holiday Supplements; by the mid-'80s, reverential interviews with the temporary aristocracy — '60s countercult figures — are supplanted by fawning pieces on the old/new aristocracy: the rich, the famous and the powerful. Geez, it's a long way from Brannan Street SF to Fifth Avenue.

It's easy to sneer at *Rolling Stone* and this generous impulse arises from a mixture of disappointment, envy and outrage. Like Mick Jagger, the magazine's current dire state makes you undervalue its past achievements. During the late '60s/early '70s, *Rolling Stone* helped to nurture a particular strand of pop writing which, with its combination of analysis, commitment and sheer force of personality, has rarely been bettered. Unlike the narrow sectarianism of British pop writing, which is usually both unedited and labouring under an excess of unwarranted egotism, the best pieces in this book — Charles Young on the Sex Pistols, Gerri Hershey on Michael Jackson, Greil Marcus on Woodstock — are models of intelligent and passionate pop reportage.

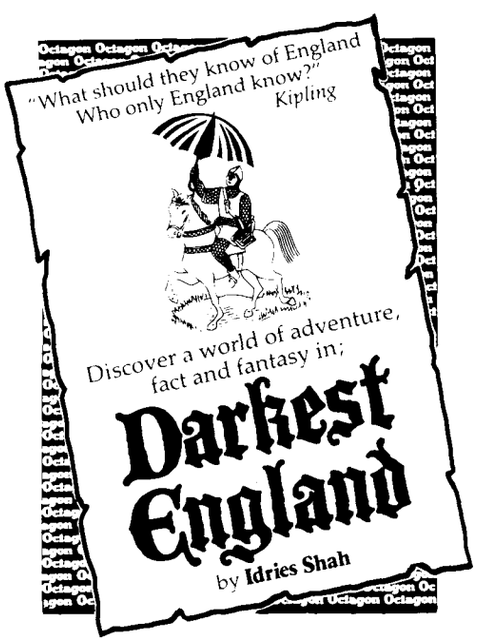
Much of *Rolling Stone's* success lay in its tapping into a mid-range gap in the market for a pop/lifestyle mag that hasn't existed here: a Brit edition failed in 1970, as did an interesting mid-'70s equivalent, *Street Life.* The magazine's rates of pay, offices, expenses, word count, etc. make Brit pop writers drool: it *ought* to be able to afford good journalism. And so it did, containing, apart from the pop pieces, ground-breaking investigations about Charles Manson, Kent State, Veitnam Veterans and Karen Silkwood, alongside the pyrotechnics from star writers like Hunter Thompson and Tom Wolfe, whose 'Funky Chic' nails early '70s fashion *dead.* Both strands die off in the early '80s — the 'new journalism' swamped by designer egos and the political investigations replaced by the less capital-intensive celebrity interview.

One phrase epitomises *Rolling Stone's* shift of emphasis from Yippie to Yuppie: 'rock and roll'. No, not 'Rock'n'Roll': that's a musical style and the abbreviation is a bit vulgar. 'Rock and roll' describes the voracious need for self-affirmation common to many baby boomers — *our* times, *our* music, *our* youth. This isn't culture, it's marketing masquerading as culture, best seen in *Rolling Stone's* recent '100 Best Albums Of The Last Twenty Years' supplement, where sundry countercultural classics — including , as *Rolling Stone must* encompass everything important, the Sex Pistols at number 2 — nestled next to the ads that were what the whole exercise was really about: Reebok, Warner, Columbia, Mercury, House of Seagram and Art Carved class rings. Like MTV and cowboy boots, Jann Wenner's 'rock and roll' marks the baby booomers' eco-cultural hegemony. □

Revelations

Connie Bensley

Last night, I dreamed a dream
of such significance
that, symbol by metaphor, I unpicked it
and understood the mistakes of the past:
the deceptions, the mistimings,
the mysterious intractabilities
of the heart.
Unfortunately
it came rather late —
being of potential value
only if we are scheduled to go round again
on the same circuit.



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ARTS

CINEMA

Tricks and treats

Judith Williamson

House of Games (15)
Cannons Haymarket, Tottenham Court Road, Screen on the Hill

THE HOUSE OF GAMES is a tawdry, backstreet gambling den whose name, printed on the yellow glass window, joins the collection of tackily-lit signs on a dark night as steam pours upwards through the street vents. This is the scene confronting Margaret Ford, successful psychiatrist and bestselling author of *Driven: A Guide to Compulsive Behaviour in Everyday Life*, as she enters the 'real' world outside the consulting room — in what starts as a courageous attempt to help a young patient but continues as a compulsion of her own.

A shot like this, a scenario like this, in almost any other contemporary film would be top-heavy with reference. The steamy backstreets of *film noir* are so constantly evoked in contemporary cinema and style mags that many films seem to be about little else. The 'other side of town' movie, that socially constructed piece of pseudo-psychologising represented by a film like *Blue Velvet* (or *Something Wild*), invariably starts with a nice, white, middle-class person stepping into an underworld which is also their own inner world.

But *House of Games* falls into none of these slick patterns. Extraordinarily rich, with brilliantly intricate plot, what is also striking about it as a film is its straightforwardness. If that sounds like a contradiction in terms, it may be partly because we are becoming increasingly unused to films which work well as films — not as style handbooks, travel brochures or Habitat catalogues, nor as cinema history, political pamphlet or literary essay. *House of Games* has an almost classical integrity as a narrative film. It functions through the complete integration of plot, image and characterisation, and its meanings are not givens that can be separated from these, but are produced by them, and reverberate across them in a way that continues in your mind long after the film itself is over.

For Dr Ford's entry into the House of Games and her increasing involvement with Mike, the con man she meets there, offer not a simple piece of symbolism ('the dark side of the self') but a complicated set of parallels and discoveries which are, in a sense, never completed, since the end of the film forces you to re-read from the beginning, and rather than wrapping up a solution raises even more questions. But, complex as the plot is, the drive to discovery is ultimately focussed on Margaret Ford: what makes *her* do what she does? The mystery of woman's character is a central component of the *film noir* — but it has traditionally been a puzzle to be solved by the male protagonist. Here, in a fascinating reversal, the main protagonist is the woman: the narrative unfolds through her eyes, we enter Mike's world through her, and never know more about him than she knows. Thus the unravelling of the plot is also her voyage of discovery: and the more she finds out about Mike, the more she uncovers her own feelings.

No smoke without fire: Joe Mantegna and Lindsay Crouse trade symptoms in *House of Games*

The work of both con man and psychiatrist depends on gaining someone's trust. Both are adept at reading clues: it is Mike who tells Margaret that our thoughts and wishes will always find some form of expression — a classic Freudian perception. Both have highly developed ways of interpreting unconscious language. But the richness of the film goes far beyond this (in itself, potentially anti-psychoanalytic) analogy between conman and shrink: the work of each is written into the film itself.

For the film carefully sets up a psychoanalytic language which we can use to 'read' its actions by. Margaret's supervisor is central to this, drawing attention to the fact that the newly wealthy Margaret won't 'treat herself' to a nice cigarette lighter, picking out a verbal slip when Margaret discusses a patient, and so on. If Margaret's tough Single Working Woman persona is on one level undermined by the plot (and this film relates to the SWW genre in ways not unlike *Black Widow*), I would argue that psychoanalytic discourse itself is not, since it is precisely what we are led to use in 'analysing' Margaret. But this process, far from allowing us to see through her, only makes her character more complex and more opaque.

What we do see through, however, is the confidence trick. And this, too, is bound into the form of the film: when the lights go on in the backroom and the 'characters' drop their con roles, it is ourselves as audience who, quite as much as the victim, have been duped, who have suspended disbelief. This ultimately raises the question of just how gritty and violent the underworld is, as layer after layer of the plot is unpeeled. Thus the film's meanings and its structure are inextricably linked.

House of Games' effectiveness as a film is particularly interesting because it is playwright David Mamet's first foray into directing.

Neither Lindsay Crouse, who plays Margaret, nor Joe Mantegna, who plays the con-man Mike, are well known screen figures. So they don't carry ready-made meanings as stars but function purely as characters within the film. This is not to say that there is any attempt at realism; on the contrary, there is a subtle way in which they speak their lines exactly like film characters — which is what they are. That abruptness of *film noir* dialogue, the cool repartee, the lighting of cigarettes — *House of Games* isn't *about* these things, as reference, it *uses* them directly, plays then straight, for its own ends. And what is almost as interesting as the film itself is the fact that this is now so unusual as to seem worthy of remark. □

POLICY

Return to centre

Naseem Khan

'EVERY TOWN SHOULD have one,' declared John Lane in the late 1970s. And, since then, many towns have obliged. There are now around 300 arts centres in the British Isles, about double the number in existence when Lane wrote his seminal book about the concept.

Although the expansion rate has now slowed down — no Housing the Arts Fund from the Arts Council to give things a leg-up; local authority

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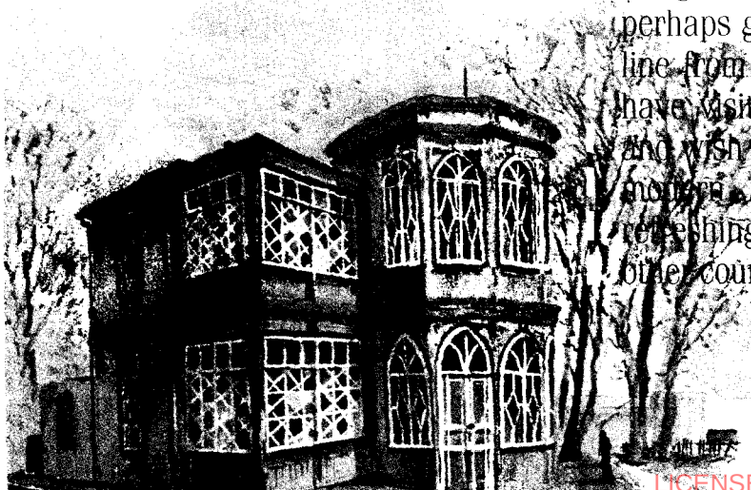
This itinerary has been designed to give an introductory tour to Albania, designed for the curious, who have perhaps gazed at the beautiful coastline from the island of Corfu, or who have visited other socialist countries and wish to have an insight into life in modern Albania. It will provide a refreshing experience hard to find in other countries.



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cutbacks; a general squeeze on the arts — the collective spirit seemed high when a number of arts centre representatives recently met. Indeed, the annual conference of the National Association of Arts Centres (NAAC) was unusual for its absence of hard-luck stories.

This is not to say that they don't exist. The report that the conference first considered made it clear that arts centres offer little in the way of wealth and ease (of which more later). But there is courage in numbers — a total work force of around 6,000 and a total revenue (including that of the giant Barbican and South Bank) of £56,000-odd — and in having gained a position of orthodoxy.

If any example were needed of how quickly the revolutionary becomes the accepted, then arts centres would be a fine one. Thirty years ago, they barely existed. Arts provision was automatically fragmented: a gallery here, a theatre there, a cinema or two somewhere else. Putting all the arts forms under one roof — with the resultant increase in openness and cross-stimulation — was a startling step in its time.

The likes of the South Bank, with its enviable budget, were not in sharp focus at the NAAC event (though NAAC numbers it among its members). The first job of the conference was to consider a major report. *Arts Centres in the UK*, by Robert Hutchison and Susan Forrester, is the most substantial consideration of what it calls 'the *genus* arts centre' since John Lane's. Commissioned by the Policy Studies Institute, at the prompting of NAAC, it set itself a head-spinning task: to provide a statistical picture of arts centres nationally, detailed case studies and recommendations for future development. Given this scope, and the singular diversity of the field, it is hardly surprising that the study has turned out extremely dense.

Its 220 pages contain a weight of detail. You can find out from it how the pay scales vary (predominantly low), how the balance of art forms works (94 per cent have exhibition space; 12 per cent have video editing facilities), how many centres do outreach work (61 per cent), how easy business sponsorship has proved (only five out of 18 independent London centres have raised any). You can find mention of the areas of debate and internal questioning. What, for a start, *is* an arts centre? ('Peculiarly amorphous,' says the report, but nevertheless goes for 'a building which provides a regular base for substantial programmes of activities in more than one art form.') How should marketing function? What is the role of volunteers? Of MSC? For the reader with patience and motivation, there is a great deal to dig up.

Now for the other side. There are three main ways in which *Arts Centres* falls down. First, in simple terms of accessibility (that arts centre virtue): there is no doubt that the book is hard going. It's also frustrating going. Time and again one wants the argument to be extended beyond the statistic. Does the fact that 43 per cent of arts centre membership schemes earn less than £1,000 p.a. obviate the scheme, say something about those particular geographical/class areas, about volunteers, or what? Second, there is a confusion about where the report is directed. It can't be aimed at the general public, since it's not set out to attract and engage the general reader; nor can it be aimed at the arts centres, since too much of its information is basic. Third, there's a curious lack of context. It's as if the surface of the *genus* had been gone over with a strong magnifying-glass. At the end, each detail of the body's clothing, pores and appendages is known. But how they add up and how they relate to a wider context is still a mystery.

It is the collection of raw data that will be of long-term importance and this is a shame because parts like the final chapter, with its reminders of arts centres' unique capabilities, make it clear that a more qualitative approach was on the cards. Both authors are people of high ability, sensitivity and commitment to democratic arts structures. Somehow they have let themselves get fitted up with a straitjacket. The body and spirit have yet to emerge.

Hutchison himself engagingly pre-empted criticism at the NAAC conference by admitting the report's shortcomings. Rightly, he reiterated support for two of its generally sound recommendations: for revival of Housing the Arts (but in conjunction with incentive funding and funding for refurbishment) and for 'a new generation of arts centres for young people' ('an absolute peanut in the total educational budget').

Appearances, the outward face, were matters close to the conference's heart. The seminars concentrated on image, presentation, advertising. But underneath, almost without discussion, NAAC was moving the goal posts. An arts centre, conference formally decided, need no longer be a building. Anybody working to develop multidisciplinary arts with a strong participatory bend could qualify: local authority arts departments, bodies like SHAPE, animateurs. The constitutional change will swell NAAC's already growing ranks and will take the arts centre further away from the 'introverted cosiness' noticed by Lane in the early centres. But it could present it with further problems of definition. □

THEATRE

Waiting for God

Victoria Radin

J. J. Farr
RONALD HARWOOD *Phoenix Theatre*
Berlin Days Hollywood Nights
NIGEL GEARING *The Place until 28 November*

A CLUE TO Ronald Harwood's fairly baffling **J. J. Farr**, a play about religious belief, may be found in its programme note. It takes the form of an interview between the author and his director, Ronald Eyre, and a Catholic priest. This (anonymous) father says that the ability to love is a prerequisite for the priesthood; that all love is sexual and that those who are 'numb below the waist' deserve no place in the clergy.

Harwood's play doesn't explore this tantalising paradox: it is a work which discards the nether regions in favour of the head. But the key to this peculiar evening, which nods at the subjects of terrorism, torture and bigotry before embracing in a bear hug the idea of Belief, may be the concept of love which, so Harwood suggests, may make faith somehow more virile than atheism.

J. J. Farr, the titular hero with a jazzy name, is returning home after having been held captive by Muslim terrorists. Home is, as their Warden describes it, a 'subsidised limbo' or halfway house for doubting priests among whom J. J., a militant atheist whose sayings are enshrined in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, is its most celebrated member. Lumped about the lawn of Jocelyn Herbert's set of a dowdy country mansion witteringly awaiting his arrival are the caustic Warden (Bernard Lloyd), an elderly clergyman (Hugh Paddick) whose graceful liturgical wrist movements once wrought tears of envy from ballerinas, a sexually obsessed worker-priest (Trevor Peacock), a pleasant ineffectual (Dudley Sutton) and Lowrie (Bob Peck), the aggressive new boy who has lost God but who instead worships J. J. Farr.

Harwood's play swings between wary Iris Murdochian urbanities in the garden and Farr's Heart of Darkness memories of horror until it finally settles on an emotional duel between the luckless Lowrie and the former hostage. Asked while in captivity to give the sacrament to a dying Irish priest, Farr had improvised with a vial of urine and, as he took 'God' into his mouth, underwent what the others call a reversion. When his imperviousness to Lowrie's quite familiar arguments against the deity results in the younger man's attempted suicide, J. J. is booted out of limbo.

With Graham Greene's old confrontation of faith v. adultery latterly rattling the hankies down the road, religion — of the organised, Christian kind — appears to be making a comeback on the stage and I salute Ronald Harwood's attempt to cope anew with this unpropitious subject. But his real theme is our need to see people as we want to see them: in other words, our failure to love them as they are.

Physically weakened, haunted by his memories of captivity and shriven of his attractive disbelief, Finney's seedy, moose-like J. J. wins only revulsion and withdrawal from the community who once idolised him. If Harwood had made the contest an equal one, if he hadn't wanted so badly to stick only to big subjects, his little play might have been larger.

We hear less of Hanns Eisler than we do of Kurt Weill but he was an important Brechtian musical collaborator both in Germany and in Hollywood, who believed that music should be 'not just consolation but help with the fight'. **Berlin Days Hollywood Nights**, Nigel Gearing's highly intelligent dramatised biography of Hanns and his elder brother and sister, illustrated by the composer's own songs, demonstrates how that truth still holds: I left uplifted and spoiling for political warfare. The trouble is: where is that fight?

Eisler fought everywhere. A German Jew, he left his country in 1933, toured Eastern Europe and Spain (where he made music for the International Brigade), moved to Hollywood where he was awarded an Oscar (for the Brecht-scripted *Hangmen also Die*) and was deported back to Germany (where he composed the national anthem for the new Democratic Republic) after an appearance before that early Richard Nixon circus, the House Un-American

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Activities Committee.

His siblings were equally busy. Ruth, head of the German CP in pre-Nazi days, fetched up in the USA as a Hearst reporter who labelled Brecht 'the minstrel of the Soviet police' before shopping both her brothers to HUAC; Gerhart, also a CP official, imprisoned in the USA by Ruth's efforts, became the head of East German State Broadcasting. Small wonder that Charlie Chaplain said of this infinitely dynamic, industrious and inimical family that they 'do things as in Shakespeare'.

Though fettered by facts (and most of them unfamiliar), Gearing doesn't opt for the chronological plod but wings it with a mosaic-like overview using Brechtian scenes in which Hanns' own music and lyrics, even when lifted out of context, serve to provide the emotional highlights. The tone (and the spare, black, white and blood-red look designed by Lucy Weller and David Roger) is curiously contemporary: hard, elegant, unsentimental and all the more moving. Fidelis Morgan (also good on the drums) makes of the enigmatic Ruth a dignified presence in whom one believes; Robin Soans (also a fine pianist) creates a Hanns who adds a dogged wisdom to his other virtues. When, in Pip Broughton's wonderfully assured and inventive direction, he is baited to perjure himself by the HUAC judge, who turns into a devil on stilts, we see him nearly tempted but fundamentally unable to lie. If playwrights no longer tell us how to fight (instructions I never believed in) at least they can suggest how we used to. □

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THEATRE

At the funeral

Paul Allen

Pentecost
STEWART PARKER *Ard Howen Theatre, Enniskillen and tour*

'YOU'LL FIND IT a nice little town,' said the man who had parked next to me. A Dublin businessman, he was pleased to find somebody who knew even less about the geography of Enniskillen than he did. And nice they are, the town and the people. But then it's a nice country. And then again, if it were as nice as all that, would there have been a play at all, or any very compelling reason to catch it in Enniskillen as it tours all Ireland?

A long, narrow main street winds over a low hill between Lough Erne and Upper Lough Erne. On top, a town hall with an ascetically thin tower in grey local stone, then Saint McCartan's Church of Ireland cathedral. Churches and more churches, all grey. But when, in *Pentecost*, that immensely likeable actor Stephen Rea asks: 'I wonder what it was like, before Christianity?' there is a stillness in the audience (containing at least four priests and/or pastors) pondering much more than a town without churches.

In the shopwindow of *The Impartial Reporter* is a bank of local newspaper photographs of the desolate aftermath of the Remembrance Sunday bomb. Nobody looks at them now, except the latest media arrival; if anybody thinks I am a voyeur, nothing is said, but there are stories of TV crews from London swilling champagne in the smart hotel on the edge of town after they had filmed their fill that day and clearly the people of Ireland are still shockable.

Is it possible to discover what makes a people tick? Stewart Parker's new play searches among the ashes of the Ulster psyche and finds chiefly a self-loathing, from which the hatred of others follows as fluently as night follows day. It also leads to a kind of answer, although it is not one which will appear on any political agenda. Towards the end of the play, Mr Rea's character goes on to say that if Christ came to Ulster today he'd put a torch to all the churches, drive out the priests and pastors and force people to look for mercy and belief in each other instead. Christ as counter-terrorist? But Parker's real proposal is different and it comes from Eileen Pollock as the heroine. There is, she says, something of Christ in each of us. Find it and learn to like yourself enough to like others.

This is humanism wearing Christian disguise and witnessing to a touching faith in modern psychology; besides which, it reduces the play to something of a dramatised sermon — and one which will hardly be heard by the less nice people whose hatred of self (and others) has progressed to the point of psychopathy so that they really do know not what they do.

Pentecost is sententious but then this is the culture which produced George Bernard Shaw. Parker gets his characters to their spiritual awakening with considerable wit and ingenuity, though not a very probable plot. Against a background of the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike that destroyed the power-sharing experiment, Lenny (Stephen Rea) is a trombone-playing Roman Catholic who inherits a terrace slum last lived in by a Protestant widow. His estranged wife tracks him down (it is the house she wants, not the man) and she is followed by the battered wife of a policeman and an old friend who already loves himself quite enough — he is making money in Birmingham but is irresistibly drawn back to what he calls 'Lilliput'. Add the ghost of the old woman; add further the information that all are missing out on personal relationships and most have pasts littered with dead children and you'll see we are being offered a neat range of images of sterile inhumanity, not naturalistic soap opera.

Stewart Parker does not handle the Biblical rhetoric of self-hate as effectively as Frank McGuinness in an earlier examination of the Ulster soul, *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. (McGuinness's companion play, *Carthaginians*, exploring the flavour of specifically Catholic guilt, was to have accompanied *Pentecost* in the current tour but was withdrawn without full explanation.) There is, however, enough energy in Patrick Mason's fine production for the marvellous Field Day Theatre Company from Derry to make the most of the play's bouncy rhythm and dangerous jokes while holding aloft the hefty bulk of its speechmaking.

To deliver acrid asides about the 'IRA liberating us from our legs, our brains and our children' takes not simply courage but real authority in Enniskillen or anywhere else in Northern Ireland. The intense attentiveness in the auditorium at this point is something the theatre in our still comfortable country achieves very rarely. There are easier, though still edgy, responses to lines like the one about the only difference between weddings and funerals being that 'nobody takes photographs at funerals — except the Special Branch'.

In the last few weeks I've seen new plays on this side of the water about living with the Bomb (Bob Eaton's *Out With A Bang*) and the sinking of the Titanic as a metaphor for modern Britain (Peter Biddle's *The True Story of the Titanic*). Both were enjoyable but would instinctively run a mile rather than tackle the real pain that comes with such matters and, consequently, offer real illumination. There is no point in criticising plays for not doing what they never set out to do, but I can and do regret the detached triviality of much modern English theatre. The reality of a roadblock, I have been reminded, is having a powerful gun closely trained on your head with a soldier of your 'own' army crouched behind it while you are sized up for the elementary right of freedom of movement. We don't *need* that sort of 'normal security' to produce substantial theatre. Do we? □

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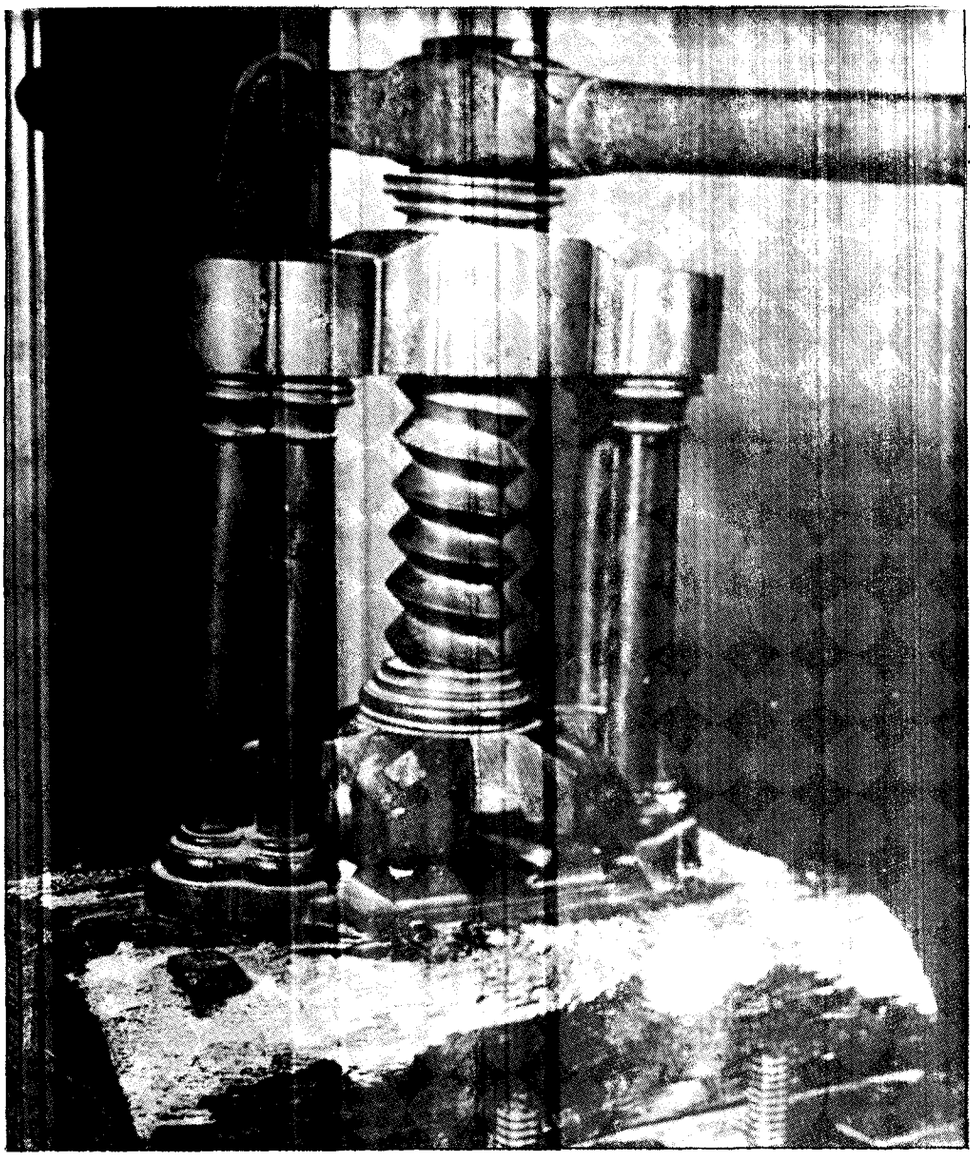


Seal press at the RA: the one indication that the Middle Ages were also an age of progress

DESIGN

False impression

Jules Lubbock

Age of Chivalry
Royal Academy

A MACHINE three quarters of a millenium old, from the 1230s, was the most extraordinary object that caught my eye. It is a press for making those magnificently ample red wax seals, impressed with personal insignia and suspended by a ribbon from official documents.

In operation the press is simple enough, consisting of a screw or worm gear vertically mounted in a thread supported by a pair of small gothic columns. What is striking is the high precision of the glistening bronze gear, which would not look out of place amongst the steam engines in the Science Museum, and the 'feel' of a machine tool that works smoothly. Yet, apart from the equally precise and sharply cut seal dies that were used with it, it is the only machine on display.

This omission, and the very title of the show, support a misleading impression of the two centuries from 1200 to 1400, two of the most progressive and revolutionary in the history of western Europe. They saw the rise of world trade, the beginnings of exploration (Marco Polo and all that) and, in science, in the small, relatively backward England to which this show is devoted, the 'calculatores' of Merton College, Oxford — a group of scientists from whose milieu that monastic super-sleuth, William of Baskerville in Eco's *Name of the Rose*, was culled. They were amongst the first to advance the concept of applying exact measurement and calibration to natural phenomena. Why, for instance, were we not shown the Salisbury Cathedral Clock, which is an embodiment of perhaps the most deep-seated principle of the modern world, that of measured time?

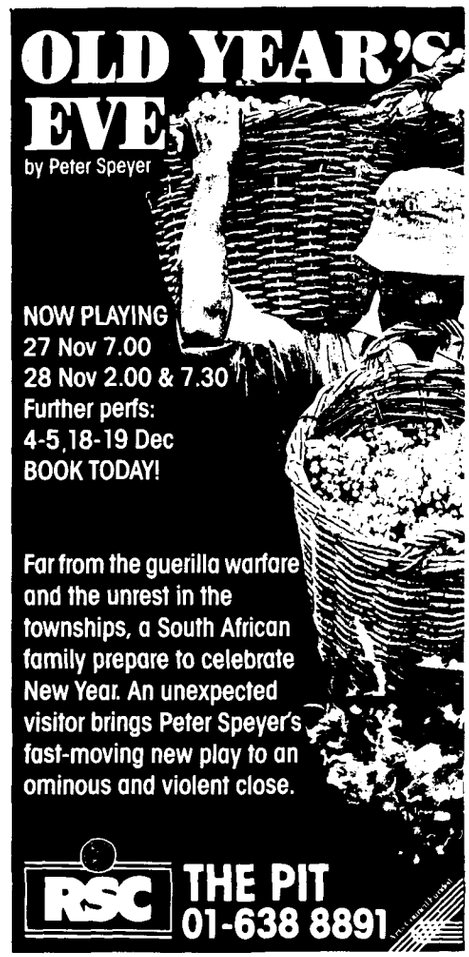
This was not an age of superstition. *The Age of Chivalry* was clearly a title cooked up to market the exhibition, since there is little evidence of knights in shining armour — not even their wonderfully machined armour — with the exception of the funeral achievements of the Black Prince from his tomb in Canterbury, his shield, his crested helm, his gauntlets and gipon — awesome, heraldic relics.

It could be argued, I know, that this is an exhibition of art, not of science, but the art was deeply imbued with the same mathematical principles, the architecture is based on the most subtle proportional systems, reflecting celestial harmonies, the ornament is applied geometry and, of course, everywhere, there is evidence of amazing technological mastery — whether in the bracing of a cathedral spire, in a stained glass window or in a piece of embroidery. The glittering richness of the period, so well conveyed by the exhibition, was not some primitive, childlike vision.

In short, I regret a lost opportunity to advance the idea, held by a group of scholars who have formed the Villard de Honnecourt Society, of contesting the popular view of the Renaissance as the great period of the emancipation of human society from the servitude of the so-called Middle Ages. Perhaps it was the other way round. Perhaps the Renaissance was, in its early stages, a retrenchment.

This point was half-recognised by such an important propagater of the Renaissance in England as John Evelyn, who referred to the gothic as the 'modern' manner of building, as distinct from the 'ancient'. And though Evelyn condemned it as 'fantastical and licentious', the early Gothic Revivalists of the 18th century justified it on the grounds of its unique originality and independance from the classical tradition.

With these reflections off my chest, I can pick and choose a few favourites from this nonetheless amazing treasury. First there is the mid-13th-century Annunciation group of Gabriel and Virgin from the entrance to the chapter house of Westminster Abbey, figures of befitting gravity, purity and admirable restraint in their facial expressions and bodily gestures and drapery. From the same period comes a door from the infirmary of Norwich Cathedral, completely covered with a flourish of iron scrolls which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transform themselves into a pair of dragons at the top and which served no other purpose than to dignify the entrance to a hospital and maybe to ward off evil spirits. It reminds us that ornament was not applied indiscriminately but that there were strict rules, particularly evident in liturgical music, governing its use.

Most of the objects are ecclesiastical, but Ruskin rightly insisted that gothic was not a specifically Christian style, rather the style of the period as a whole, domestic and secular as well. And there is a fine group of pottery including a tiny green glazed jug, only five inches high, with the protruding eyes of an old man and his spindly arms tugging at his beard simply incised in the clay.

In Winchester Cathedral, in his chantry chapel, there still lies the smiling effigy of William of Wykeham, the upwardly mobile son of a free peasant who rose to become Chancellor of England. Here, I like to think, is the archetypal senior civil servant, the ideal Sir Humphrey, smiling eternally in some celestial region of economical truths. In his will he left to his own foundation of New College, Oxford, his crozier enriched with tiny figures and, within the scroll of the crook, a bearded man kneeling in prayer before the Annunciation — a cathedral in miniature. He also left his mitre — and there it is, an incredibly stagey piece of costume, complete with its own, original leather mitre-case, a kind of mediaeval hat box (which, in a way, I suppose it is). Anyhow, I can now picture William setting out for meetings of the King's Council wearing his ineffable smile with his mitre-case in one hand and, who knows, his brief-case in the other, full of sealed rolls and charters. □

TELEVISION

Anyone who had a heart

Hugo Williams

WHAT FUN to see the leonine Paul Johnson, gold hair and tie, red handkerchief and face, picking up the ratlike David Montgomery, schoolboy editor of the *News of the World*, and shaking him by the scruff of the neck while supposedly **Thinking Aloud** (BBC2) about 'Media Ethics'. He had to be told twice by Michael Ignatieff to put him down, but his jaws had locked on the subject of Montgomery's 'disgraceful part' in the entrapment of Jeffrey Archer and the muck-raker escaped with barely half his face.

Journalism isn't the loveliest profession to look at, but there was something wonderfully sickening about the sight of these successful men carefully drawing the ethical line to suit their respective cloths. David Leigh of the *Observer* was pleased to be above 'theft', but quietly amused at his own tolerance of phone-bugging. Desmond Wilcox took it upon himself to distinguish on our behalf between 'public interest' and 'the interest of the public'. Paul Johnson simply lost his temper and went mauve. 'I would very much like to see an editor go to prison for invasion of privacy,' he said, looking at Montgomery, who was wedged into the same sofa. One agreed, but couldn't help hoping it would be him. His sunburst countenance is the result of a smouldering pomposity: 'Are you saying I don't mean what I say, young man?' Well of course! On reflection, I preferred the openly amoral Montgomery, but he shouldn't look so ashamed of himself and his pointless rag.

You can't help hating people who do things for religious reasons — who are they fooling? — but the religious programme **Everyman** (BBC1) has found a way round this stigma by concentrating on virtuous as opposed to merely Christian behaviour. *Stand by Your Man* was about 'the holiest virtue' of loyalty, that of wives who virtually share the gaol sentences of their robber-rapist husbands. Rhona Prime turned her husband Jeffrey in for the related crimes of spying and child-molesting. She'll be waiting for him when he comes out, though whether from guilt or Christian feeling is a moot point. (The great Tammy Wynette was in town that night and had a sad shot at her hit 'Stand By Your Man' on **Live from the Palladium** (ITV).)

Last week *Everyman* made a bid for a wider audience with a major investigation into the disappearance in Honduras of the American Catholic priest Fr Guadalupé. It's the usual story, as illustrated in the film *Missing*, of ordinary, patriotic, middle-aged Americans, in this case Guadalupé's sister and brother-in-law, having their eyes gradually opened to their country's nefarious deeds. They trudged in his footsteps, visited his book-lined, mud-floored hut and started picking up rumours that contradicted the US ambassador's bland, half-smiling confidences that the revolutionary priest had fallen behind his guerilla column, got lost or died of starvation. He'd been arrested, they heard, possibly tortured, certainly executed, probably by the CIA.

That was three years ago. This August a member of the Honduran death squad who captured the priest turned up as a fugitive in Canada and was prepared to talk to the pair on camera. It had been General Alvarez himself who detained and questioned Guadalupé. Yes, he had forgiven his tormentors, spreading his arms as on a cross. He had almost certainly been thrown from a helicopter into the jungle. We watched as they listened.

Neither the capitalist nor Marxist church could accept the title of Fr Guadalupé's book, *To Be a Christian Is to Be a Revolutionary*, but perhaps the **Gnostics** (C4) could. The more this series on 'the earliest modern philosophers' progresses, the more it looks like the way Christianity was supposed to have been — 'intuitive', 'imaginative', worshipping an 'Unknown God', 'a Laughing Jesus', 'the Divine within us' before the politicians got their hands on it. The series shows in no uncertain terms that the early Church deliberately stifled these independent (and distinctly oriental) thinkers in their struggle to survive, just as it does today (see above). Their efforts were aided in latter times by one Mohammed Ali, who, in 1945, discovered their secret heretical Gospels hidden in a jar buried on the side of a mountain and gave them to his wife for fire-lighters (one was saved). Did he regret his mistake? 'No, I don't care at all, I never think about these things,' said Ali, who was nevertheless taking considerable credit for the find. 'I killed someone with a knife and ate his heart. I went to gaol and when I came out she'd burnt them.' His wife wasn't asked for her opinion.

I was happy to learn on **The Friday Report** (BBC2) that witchcraft is on the increase in the South East, a sort of yuppie backlash. Witchcraft, all but the crackpot 'black' variety dignified by the term 'left path', is just our native, pre-Christian religion gone underground. Priests fear it like any usurping power and call it 'Satanism' to try and link it up with prostitution and orgies, as indeed do some pimps and sex maniacs. 'Technically there is no such thing as a black witch,' explained one. I know it will all come right in the end.

What the morals are on public smoking was the subject of *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* on **Brass Tacks** (BBC2). It seems that smoking can kill you even if you've never tasted a cigarette (firemen are less at risk from fumes). At the moment democracy protects the puffing assassins, but Helen Boaden discovered that non-smokers may be able to use the courts to ban smoking at work. She found one doctor's clerk who had actually lost her job because she *didn't* smoke. Now I know passive smoking is dangerous, I'm definitely going to give it up. □

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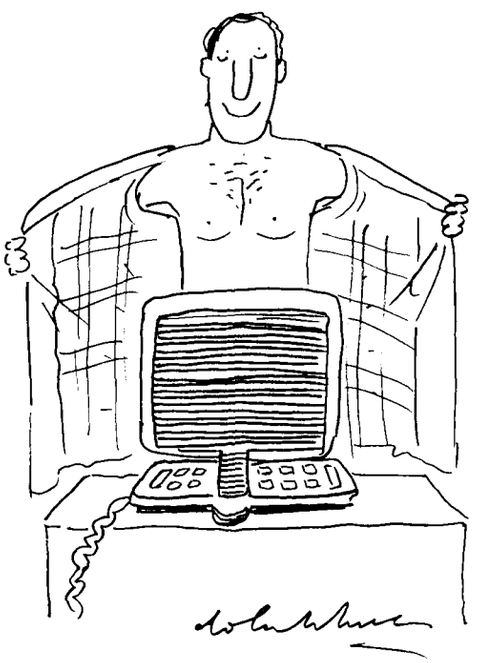
Computer deviants

David Cowan, London N17
I was surprised by Alexander Cockburn's attack on the word processor (*NS* 20 Nov.) since one supposes by his criterion that had he been writing when the typewriter or quill pen were invented he would have been the sort to object at that juncture as well; yet he advocates the use of a typewriter. The difference between a typewriter and a word processor is essentially that the former is mechanical engineering and the latter electronic engineering. So what's the problem?

The notion that word processing blights the author's ability to express or use correct grammatical formula seems to me the oddest of objections to this technology. I would agree if Cockburn merely argued that the word processor is difficult for some to employ, and I too get uncomfortable around enthusiasts, because there are a number of psychological and technical barriers to overcome in making use of technology. I think this is a line of argument which might have been more usefully followed by Cockburn.



David Butler, London SW13
The final (if undramatic) truth about word processors is that some writers like to use them, while others don't. The quality of the writing depends overwhelmingly upon the talent of the author, minimally upon the tools used. The only people more tedious than computerphiles are computerphobes. Let both groups of deviants keep their hangups to themselves.

Peter Shore's smoking gun

Bruce Kent, Vice chair, CND
If the INF agreement comes to pass it will be a bilateral not a multilateral treaty made possible because of an injection of new ideas into the disarmament process. One of them, much promoted by CND, is that in the nuclear age 'balance' is of marginal significance.

Unlike Robert McNamara Peter Shore still thinks that flexible response and nuclear first use policies make sense (*NS* 13 Nov.). It is because they don't that American (and British) first use 'weapons' and their bases ought to go. Post Chernobyl we all ought to have learnt a nuclear 'weapon' is a gun that fires in both directions.

He is wrong in suggesting that Trident, hardly independent, would be an effective deterrent. Short of a general British willingness to commit national suicide neither Trident, nor Polaris is a credible deterrent vis à vis the enemy we are supposed to face. It didn't even discourage the Argentinians from grabbing the Falklands.

What is to be welcomed is that Peter Shore is now willing to enter the defence and security debate. Public discussion starting at ward level ought to be a precondition for any Labour Party review of policy and there is much to be done, not to water down, but to make present policy really coherent. There is no time to lose. Already NATO leaders are planning to circumvent an INF deal by talking of 'plugging the gaps.' An alternative internationalist world view, stressing common security and a redirection of resources to the real needs of humanity, is not an unattractive one. It could even win votes — especially if it was understood that independent British initiatives could encourage reciprocal developments by others and thus bring vision closer to reality.

Lastly British unilateralism arose not out of late seventies pessimism but, many years before, out of moral conviction.

Martin Upham, London N15
Multilateralism is, at root, a pro-nuclear policy which dares not speak its name. When confronted by the prospect of concrete (not abstract) multilateralism in the form of the possible Reagan-Gorbachev pact Mrs Thatcher was and is terrified. The effect of possessing nuclear weapons is to make governments want to keep them, not bargain them away.

The problem with people like Peter Shore is that he actually accepts the Conservative analysis of defence. There is, for example, no hint of regret in his article — or even an acknowledgement — of the massive uprating (unilateral rearmament) that Trident represents in comparison to Polaris. And when he talks about 'surrender rather than experience a nuclear assault' he clearly reveals that he endorses the imaginary spectre of a Russia itching to conquer the West. This of course conflicts with the view of Gorbachev as open to persuasion, advanced in his conclusion.

Desmond Boon, Northallerton, North Yorkshire
Would the US so willingly supply Britain with nuclear weapons if there was the slightest risk that they might be used independently and so possibly involve the US in a nuclear conflict not of its choosing? Clearly the US knows that these weapons can never be used and so can never be threatened to be used.

The impotence of Britain's nuclear weapons being so apparent, it follows that these weapons cannot give Britain a greater status or voice in international affairs nor prevent Britain from having to accept 'a satellite role'. It is illusory to believe that Britain or any other similar sized nation can be independent in defence (or other field with international import), and that is why we must create a politically united Europe to exercise any significant influence in world affairs.

Stewart Kemp, Sheffield S7
With his many years of political experience, Peter Shore will know that morality has little to do with defence or any other policy. Moral flaws in Labour's policy are no greater than those of other major parties. Yet, unlike other major parties, Labour's defence policy offered some hope. I hope it will continue to do so.

A nuclear disarmed Britain would demonstrate a commitment to enacting international treaties it has signed, like the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and could, without hypocrisy, seek to extend the authority of that treaty. In this way, global security could be enhanced and a nuclear weapons free-for-all averted. In that, there would be virtue.

Dr J. K. Spearing, Keswick, Cumbria
If Russian aggression has been deterred at all it has not been by fear of nuclear retaliation, but because the military balance is not such as to permit it. Despite the shamelessly distorted Ministry of Defence figures that purport to indicate the Warsaw Pact's immense superiority in manpower and conventional weaponry, more objective observers, such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the International Institute for Strategic Studies, conclude that those inequalities that do exist are far from being large enough to guarantee victory to an aggressor. In fact, according to the IISS they even fall below the level defined in Soviet tactical manuals as necessary for offensive operations. So the probability of Russian military aggression against the West shrinks to astronomically small proportions.

Peter Shore is undoubtedly right when he says that this country should support Mr Gorbachev's efforts to secure, by multilateral negotiations, the elimination of *all* nuclear weapons. Of course, this cannot be achieved at a single stroke, and will need to be accompanied by balanced reductions in manpower and conventional armaments; but given the political will to abolish these totally unethical and militarily useless weapons success is possible.

Dr William Howard, National Co-ordinator, Nuclear Weapons Freeze, Bristol
A Marplan poll for Nuclear Weapons Freeze last June, just after the general election, showed overwhelming support for an insurance policy of freezing British nuclear weapons combined with active initiatives to stop the nuclear arms race worldwide. Asked what should be done with British nuclear weapons — given the possibility of America and Russia cutting theirs — 3 per cent said 'increase', 57 per cent 'hold at current levels' and 20 per cent 'eliminate'. Asked about a worldwide nuclear test ban, 79 per cent supported and only 11 per cent opposed.

Operationally, a very practical and credible policy can be constructed which would involve a 'freeze' on British nuclear capabilities combined with an 'aggressive' negotiation for arms control measures such as a test ban, plutonium cut-off, and the maintenance of the space treaty regime.

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No 3000 **Set by Ms de Meaner**

With acknowledgments to V. S. Pritchett, who first set this Comp in *NS* 5 May 1934: Oedipus has just discovered that his name occurs many times in Freud's Lectures and brings an action for libel in the English courts; could we have summaries of the final speech for the plaintiff?

Report **By Babe Bio**

Breefly, you've sertainly come on a bit in the last fifty yeers (eksept for the nameless entrant who thort that Oedipus' dad was called Laertes) and the winners diserve their never-to-be-repeeted £20.

Oedipus:
O twelve just men! I here present my case.
First, that I have, since drawing down the night,
Had second thoughts. There is no evidence
That Laius was my father. After all,
Though I was staked out as a new-born babe
Upon a hillside in Cithaeron,
It was a common practice at the time.
The very air was thick with infant tears;
Confusion was endemic. Secondly,
Suppose we grant that wild hypothesis,
How can we know I killed him? It is true
I killed a group of men in self-defence
Where three roads meet; and round about that time
The King died at a triple intersection,
But are there not a hundred such in Thebes?
Third, the complained-of words of the defendant
Bear the construction that these deeds were done
In open knowledge of my parentage,
Which all men present know to be not so.

Chorus:
Press on, brave King, you of the swollen foot,
Reader of riddles, victor of the Sphinx!
See how the barbed interpreter of dreams
Staggers before the Corinthian's arguments!

Oedipus:
And finally, whatever acts were done,
It is not just to lay them at my door,
Since all were augured by Apollo's oracle,
The very prophet which, twixt you and me,
Has fore-ordained my victory in this case.

NOEL PETTY

From Oedipus Rex to Oedipus Complex — a once heroic figure in world literature, now a mere synonym for aspects of infantile sexuality — that is the measure of the appalling damage done to my client's reputation since the publication of Freud's lectures.

The irony is that, while Freud has reduced Oedipus to the level of a behavioural abnormality, without Oedipus Freud would probably never have been heard of.

As to the tales about Oedipus having murdered his father and married his mother, the evidence rests solely upon plays written by Sophocles, an author not above introducing sex and violence just for the sake of effect, to maximise box-office returns. Even if these stories had some foundation, I would remind you that the alleged offences both involved cases of mistaken identity; in fact, they are the sort of unfortunate accidents that could have happened to any one of us.

Let us see to it, then, that this tragic story has a happy financial ending. In view of his blindness, which prevents him from obtaining permanent employment, I ask the court, through you, m'lud, to award swingeing damages to the plaintiff, who is that saddest of all cases, a good man fallen among psychologists.

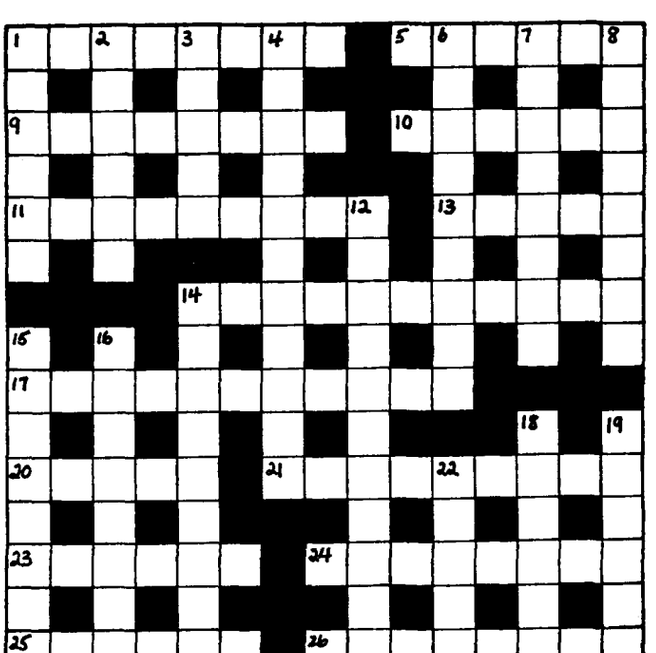
STANLEY T. SHARPLESS

You have heard the plaintiff say that he is a simple child of the Late Bronze Age, tragically caught between an age-old matriarchal system — when nobody worried about murdering their father because, owing to their hazy knowledge of the reproductive system, they didn't know who their father was (equally, being weaned at two or three took away any sexual mystique attaching to older women) — and an intruding patriarchal system. This introduced the foolhardy attempt to reckon descent in the male line, which made older men like Laius so bad-tempered and led to his death at the plaintiff's hands. The plaintiff did not know it was his father, owing to the interference of a patriarchal god at his birth (incidentally, we would just mention that Creon was noted for contributing large sums to the Apollo Building Fund). Nor did he know that Jocasta was his mother, and it would have been very impolite to refuse to marry her. He had been horrified to find his name coupled with the most depraved desires; no Bronze Age hero thought like that. If this Dr Freud does, he must be a very sick man.

JUNE F. LANGFIELD

Weekend Crossword 1579

PRIZES: £5 Book Tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1579, New Statesman, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London E2 8DQ by first post 11 December.



Name_____

Address_____

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ACROSS

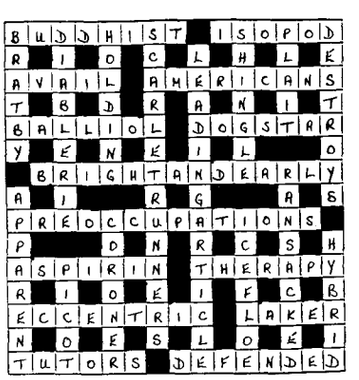
1. What is true about the change of life is that beauty treatment is needed (8)
5. Vessels used for punishment (6)
9. Bowling which is the pits? (8)
10. Learned man about to assault a shopkeeper (6)
11. The cloth makes the saint false (9)
13. Lawful if put in so or makes a lawyer (5)
14. I went about with something painful, an opportunity for sampling (11)
17. The shopkeeper puts chopped up bread into the mincer (11)
20. Place which makes an animal hot (5)
21. Ulysses, for example, in the text turned out to be a man interested in the world outside (9)
23. The orientals are rustic with us (6)
24. It is an honour when the star is about to keep company with a young man (8)
25. Make the sailor reach his mark (6)
26. In need of food as tenure is revised (8)

DOWN

1. Unattractive women make the old boys carry a drink (6)
2. Young men caught by dates being changed (6)
3. One who attracts part of the failure rehabilitation scheme (5)
4. Very cheap beer but it helps to fill one out (11)
6. Mean person holds an examination for man of principles (9)
7. Make a copper pinch someone religious (8)
8. The plan of one who is lost without a sheep (8)
12. They provide a new flame but ensure that the marriage stays firm (11)
14. Building which puts a man up after fighting on a river (9)
15. What about a little bit for the bird? (8)
16. One who gets a bear into trouble (8)
18. Look out when there is a dangerous insect about to turn hostile (6)
19. Shortened thoroughfare going round trunk road (6)
22. The smell is grim with nothing on (5)

SETSQUARE

Solution to 1577



Prizewinners to 1577

Dominic Ayssa (London SW10)
Mrs Deborah Wearing (London N8)
S. Foot (Exeter, Devon)

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Life, the Economy
27-11-JOHN MINNION

Chess

IN WORLD championship matches there is often a lull in which the players, as if by unspoken accord, pause for breath and play a few steady draws. Games 12-14 in Seville have formed just such a period of neutral respite, so we can relax our concentration on the Kasparov-Karpov contest and turn to other things. This gives me a chance to tell you about some of the books I've been sent recently.

The Complete Chess Addict, by Mike Fox and Richard James, is very nicely-timed for the Christmas market. Anyone who buys it as a present for chess-playing friends, spouse or offspring is making a pretty safe move. A well-stocked anthology of history, anecdotes, incidents, *bon mots* and curiosities can hardly fail to come up with something that appeals. My own, no doubt deplorable, taste drew me to the chapter Fox and James entitle 'The Frightful', in which they attempt a catalogue of all the worst in chess. Such record worsts as Colonel Moreau's result at Monte Carlo 1903 (26 games played, 26 games lost) or Sämisch's unique achievement of losing 13 consecutive games on time at Linköping 1969 are, of course, well known. But do you know what is the worst ever simultaneous performance? The record belongs to Joe Hayden, who took on 20 opponents at Cardiff, New Jersey, in 1977 and lost to 18 of them. He did win two games — one in which his opponent got tired of waiting and just left, and one against his mother. Or the worst ever *Fingerfehler* — touch a piece and so you have to move it? Spot the clumsy finger in **Lindemann-Echtermayer, Kiel 1893: 1. e4 d5 2. exd5 Qxd5 3. Ke2 Qe4 mate.**

Published by Faber and Faber at £5.95 *The Complete Chess Addict* is remarkably cheap for a well-produced book of 264 pages, with photos and diagrams. I was going to say that it is the sort of cosy, amiable book that has no pretensions to providing instruction. But the authors have included the scores, without notes, of 60 of the greatest games, from Bourdonnais-McDonnell (1834) to Short-Kasparov (OHRA 1986). Somewhere a child will pick up a copy, a luminous young mind will work through those games and realise 'I could play like that . . .'

The thinking that makes for performance at that level is revealed in *Secrets of Grandmaster Play* by John Nunn and Peter Griffiths (Batsford, £8.95). A naïve, pre-*Spycatcherite* complaint against the title would have it that, once published, they can't be secrets any more, can they? But what Nunn and Griffiths have to offer, in the shape of intricate annotations to 24 of Nunn's tournament games, is a contribution to the genre of *heavy analysis*, and this stuff takes plenty of lifting if the reader is to get it up off the page. Obligatory modesty in the preface has Nunn declaring that 'Alekhine, Fischer and Timman had all produced far better analysis than I could ever hope to'. Well, John, you can hardly expect this ritual grovelling to stop us drawing such comparisons. Special considerations of dramatic content, not necessarily connected with the quality of the analysis, make Fischer's *My 60 Memorable Games* unique. But Nunn and Griffiths have produced a work that can be placed alongside Timman's *The Art of Chess Analysis*, and that's saying a lot.

Saving Lost Positions by Leonid Shamkovich and Eric Schiller (Batsford, £6.95) is on a less exalted plane. It suffers from a slightly misleading title, since not all the book is concerned with salvage operations. It is in fact a collection of games and positions that illustrate how quickly fortunes can change, if the right moves aren't found. As such it may serve as a useful refresher on advanced tactics. To take a sample that derives from a topical variation in the Benoni, after:

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 c5 3. d5 e6 4. Nc3 exd5 5. cxd5 d6 6. Nf3 g6 7. Bf4 Bg7 8. Qa4 + Bd7 9. Qb3 Qc7 10. e4 0-0 11. Nd2 Nh5 12. Be3 f5 13. exf5 gxf5 14. Be2 f4 15. Bxc5 f3 16. Bxf3 Qxc5 17. Nce4 Rxf3 18. Qxf3 Qxd5. With the board wide-open and material unbalanced, it isn't too surprising that anything can happen. What happened in **Peric-Klinger, Lugano 1984** was short and sharp: **19. g4 Qe6 20. gxh5 d5 21. Rg1 dxe4 22. Qc3 Qh6 23. Qb3 + Kh8 24. Qxb7 e3!** White can't capture this: 25. fxe3 Qxe3 + 26. Kf1 Bh3 + 27. Rg2 Bd4. **25. Qxa8 exf2 + 0-1.**

So Black was winning? Shamkovich and Schiller say 'it is clear that White went wrong somewhere', and go on to point out that what he should have played was: **22. Qg3! Qh6 23. Nxe4 Nc6** Weaker are 23 . . . Kh8 24. Rd1 or 23 . . . Bc6 24. Qb3 + and 24. Ng5. **24. Qxg7 + Qxg7 25. Nf6 + Kf8 26. Rxg7 Kxg7 27. Nxd7** and White's two extra (albeit feeble) pawns give winning chances.

So it was really White who had the advantage? But Black's 19th move was wrong. S & S would have him play: **19. . . Bxg4 20. Qxg4 Nc6 21. Rg1 Rf8** when they give variations to support a claim of full compensation for the exchange. That seems to be true, and is as far as S & S take the case-study. But by now you should have been brought into the right frame of mind to turn a very sceptical eye towards 19. g4 — and the play that preceded it!

George Botterill

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This England

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☐ 'When I go shopping I can see people watching what I buy in supermarkets, so — just to let them know we are still working-class — I put a jar of jam in my basket. We were happy before we won the pools but the pressures on us have been enormous.' — *News on Sunday* (Lilian Solity)

☐ Any man or woman who calls a colleague 'luv', 'dear' or 'gorgeous' in the left-wing Borough of Brent is in trouble. Like cat-calls, wolf whistles, pin-ups or a peck on the cheek, such terms of endearment are regarded as sexual harassment, according to a 13-point set of guidelines submitted by officers for approval to the council women's committee. — *Daily Telegraph* (Brenda Rowe)

☐ Choosing new curtains for the council chamber is too important a matter to be left entirely to Poole Borough Council's new aesthetic audit working party. 'Bearing in mind the high profile of the curtains, it should possibly come to a full meeting of the council,' said the Policy Chairman. — *Western Gazette* (Joyce Nodes)

☐ There were sighs of relief at Lerwick Sheriff Court yesterday when it became apparent that two poaching trials were not going ahead and it would be unnecessary to present the evidence — 42 salmon and sea trout which had been dead for 14 months. — *The Scotsman* (R. Margaret Macdonald)

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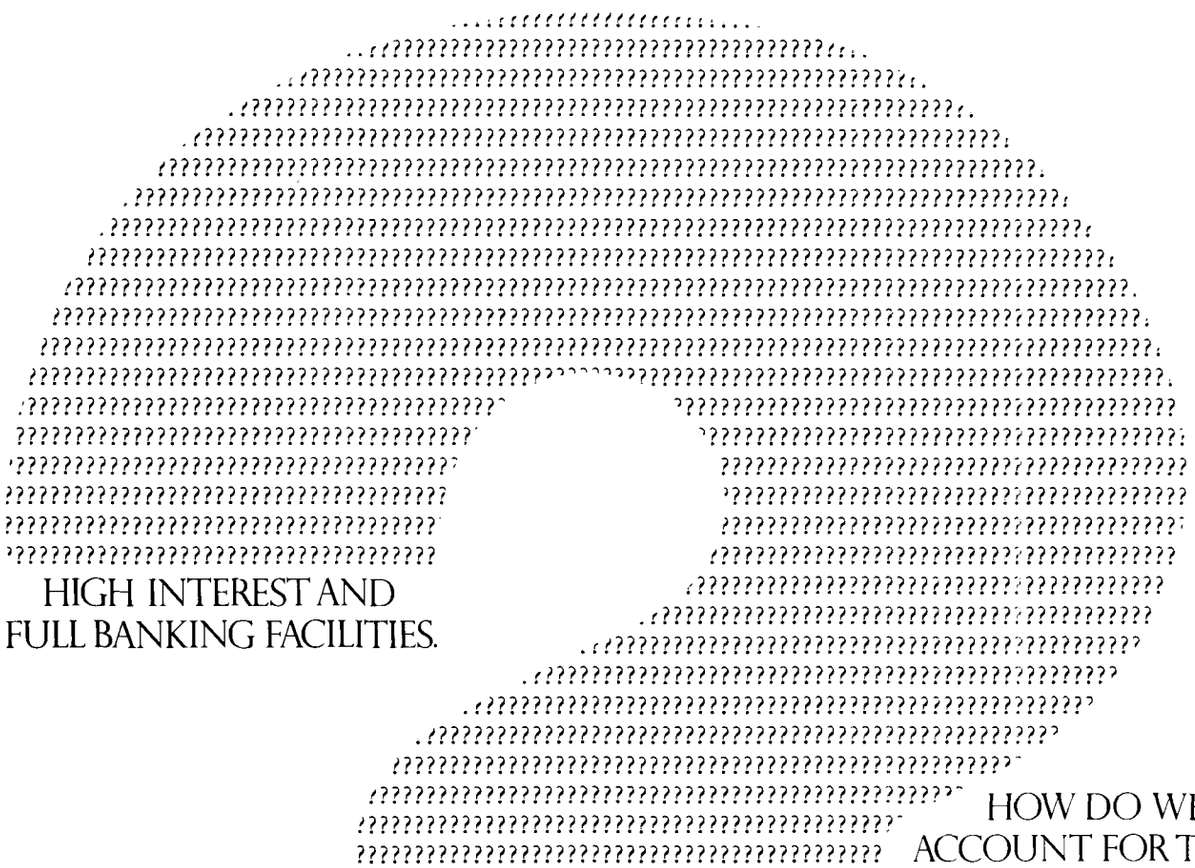

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